

# MILITARY ILLUSTRATED

□ PAST & PRESENT □

No. 20  
August/September 1989

**1944:  
Bren Gunners**

**Exclusive  
Photos:  
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Redcoats'  
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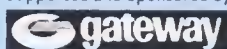
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# MILITARY ILLUSTRATED

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No.20

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# EDITORIAL

We are happy to welcome a number of first-time contributors to this issue.

**Ian V. Hogg** began his military career in 1942 in the 4th (Home Guard) Bn., King's Shropshire Light Infantry; tiring of marching at 160 paces a minute, he entered the Regular Army as a gunner in 1945. He retired as a Master Gunner in 1972, having passed the intervening years in various field regiments, in the Korean War, and as a member of the instructional staffs at the Royal School of Artillery and Royal Military College of Science. Since retirement he has been a full-time military writer and commentator, and is currently the editor of *Jane's Infantry Weapons*.

**Glenn A. Stepler**, who begins in this issue an important series on a subject close to the Editor's heart, was born in Montreal; he holds a doctorate from Oxford, and prior to coming to Britain worked for the Canadian Parks Service — that cradle of historians. He has a long-standing interest in uniforms, and was a founder of the Canadian-based *Jesup's Corps*, a loyalist unit in the brigade of the American Revolution. He currently lives in London, finishing a book on the British Volunteer for Leicestershire Museums, and another on the British soldier of the 18th century for Cambridge University Press.

**Tim Ryan**, born 1941, is a fourth-generation New Zealander whose early interest in things military was sparked by discovering that his great-grandfather had fought in several major actions of the Anglo-Maori Wars. An authority on New Zealand uniforms, he has acted as an advisor to the NZ Army Museum since its inception. He is a keen collector of 19th century weapons, militaria and model soldiers; has co-authored a book, *The Colonial New Zealand Wars*; and is currently working on an illustrated history of the New Zealand Volunteers.

**Graham Scott**, who interviewed stuntman Jim Dowdall for 'MI', was born in 1957 and spent most of his school days collecting German uniforms before going on to become



Ian V. Hogg



Glenn A. Stepler



Tim Ryan



Jamie Bisher

Graham Scott

sub-editor of the Osprey Men-at-Arms and Vanguard series in 1980. Since leaving Osprey in 1982 he has been quite busy: riding a motorbike from Cairo to Cape Town, being a motorcycle journalist, freelancing in France and, latterly, for magazines around the world on subjects as diverse as offshore powerboat racing and French chateaux. He has just got back from covering the Camel Trophy all-terrain vehicle race in the jungles and swamps of the Brazilian Amazon, a country where he was still likely to find plenty of German uniforms.

**Jamie Bisher**, who contributes our Gallery piece on Col. Charles Young, was born in Atlanta, Ga. in 1956, and graduated from the USAF Academy in 1978 with a BS degree in Humanities. Since that time he has been a convenience store clerk, a garage collector, a toy salesman, a political campaign worker, chauffeur to the First Secretary at the Lebanese Embassy, and a room clerk at the Watergate Hotel. He is currently in charge of the technical library for a 'Beltway Bandit' defence contractor in Washington, DC; and has contributed features to a number of journals. Jamie's hobby is sleuthing through records of the old Military Intelligence Division in the National Archives.

## THE TOMMY, 1939-45

This issue sees the first of a major, if occasional series in which we plan to recreate in accurate detail the appearance of the British infantryman of the Second World War. We begin with the heart of the infantry section: the Bren gunners. For technical reasons we have concentrated in this first article on the NW Europe campaign, 1944-45; and we take this opportunity to air some thoughts on the British squaddie's experience of that campaign.

Among the public at large, and even among military students of other periods, there seem to be two ideas current. The first is that the sacrifice of the British soldier was less dreadful in 1939-45 than it had been in 1914-18. The second is that from the establishment of the Normandy beachhead onwards the war was a foregone conclusion: even, God help us, something of a stroll home. Both these ideas are shockingly mistaken.

In rough figures, of the total number of British soldiers who served in France and Belgium 1914-18, some 13.4% were killed and 36.4% wounded; i.e. of the men in the war zone, roughly one in every two was hit, and of these casualties roughly one in three died. Of British troops sent overseas in 1939-45, some 4.6% were killed and 8.7% wounded; i.e. of men overseas, roughly one in seven were hit, and of these one in three died. At first sight this seems to be a much lower figure; but the comparison is quite false.

The enormous increase in logistic and other virtually non-combatant branches of service between the two dates meant that only a minority of soldiers in the war zone in 1939-45 were actually front line fighting men. (The figures which follow are for infantry, which is our subject here, but we do not, of course, understate the sacrifices of the other fighting arms.) Of the typical 1944 infantry

divisional strength of about 17,000 men, only some 4,000, in the nine infantry battalions, bore the brunt of the direct fighting. It was this group of 20%-25% of the total which took around 70% of the total casualties. The same broad ratios, applied in all theatres; and in the US Army, as in the British.

Between 13 September and 15 November 1944, 15th (Scottish) Division — heavily engaged in NW Europe — took 2,860 battle casualties; but nearly 90% of these were suffered by the 4,000-odd Jocks of the nine infantry battalions. Men who served in this division from June 1944 to May 1945 had a nearly 60% chance of becoming casualties. Some battalions in this theatre fared even worse: 1st Royal Norfolk suffered, over this period, 66% casualties — soldiers in this battalion also had a one in six chance of being killed.

Junior leaders suffered, as always, dramatically, in a campaign of advance against a brave and skilled enemy. The typical infantry battalion had between 20 and 30 officers at any one time. In the ten months between D-Day and 27 March 1945, 1st Gordon Highlanders had a total of 102 officers. Of the 55 officers who at one time or another led the 12 rifle platoons, 24% were killed and 53% wounded. Their average life with the battalion lasted just over five weeks.<sup>(1)</sup>

Statistics like these prove beyond doubt that the squaddie of 1944-45 was just as likely as his father in 1914-18 to become a casualty: between one man in two and one man in three was hit. This, in John Ellis's memorably dry phrase, was hardly a cakewalk. Over the next months and years we are going to hear a lot about our fathers' and grandfathers' war; so we would do well to get the context clear in our minds.

(1) M. Lindsay, *No Few Got Through*, Arrow, 1956.

## Desert Rats

Robin Hunter Neillands, PO Box 345, Bourne End, Bucks. SL8 5NH has been commissioned to write a personal history of the 7th Armoured Division, 1940-45, and is anxious to hear from any old soldiers with a tale to tell.

## Errata

In 'MI' No. 19, p.20, the top left photo of the helmet plate is, of course, reversed left to right: our apologies. Less obvious, and therefore even more infuriating, is the reversal of both lower photographs on p.41: our sincere apologies to readers, and to author Kevin Lyles.

## Video Releases to Buy: 'Russian Classics' (Hendring)

Those interested in Russian military history will appreciate a series of films released by Hendring under the collective title *Russian Classics*. Several deal with the Russian Revolution, and the events that led up to it, and they include most films made by the famous Russian director Sergei Eisenstein.

Eisenstein's first feature was intended to be one of a series of films that would embody and reflect the spirit of the 1917 Revolution. Ultimately, only *Strike* (1924) was made. It tells the story of a strike in a factory, precipitated when a worker commits suicide after being falsely accused by the factory managers of

stealing. It was made during that brief period of cultural freedom and experimentation that existed for a few years after the Revolution. Eisenstein used innovative editing techniques for dramatic effect which, although hardly used today, still retain much of their original power. For example, the final massacre of the strikers by mounted police is intercut with the slaughter of a bull.

His *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) told the story of an event during the unsuccessful 1905 revolution. Sailors mutiny and take over the ship after some are shot for refusing to eat maggot-infested meat. The citizens

of Odessa demonstrate in support, but are attacked by soldiers. The dramatisation of the massacre on the wide steps leading down to the sea resulted in what is arguably the most famous sequence in film history. Eisenstein contrasts the precise march of the soldiers with the panic of the citizens as they vainly try to escape the well-aimed volleys; a pram, out of control and bumping down the steps, remains the most enduring image. Although originally banned in Britain for being too subversive, the film enjoyed great success abroad and firmly established the Russian film industry as an inter-

national force. The tape contains two versions of the film, with scores by Kryukov and Meisel.

Eisenstein's *October* (1927) dramatises major events from the February Revolution, which resulted in the abdication of Nicholas II and the setting up of the Provisional Government, up to the October Revolution in which the Bolshevik party gained power. Episodes include the arrival of Lenin in St. Petersburg by train, the massacre of demonstrators in July, the attempted coup by Gen. Kornilov, and the climactic attack on the Winter Palace by Red Guards. It is this final sequence which has provided the most potent images of the Revolution, and shaped its perception in both Russia and the West. Although partly based on writings

## ON THE SCREEN



by John Reed, the film is factually inaccurate in many ways. Political rivalries meant that virtually all scenes portraying Trotsky had to be removed. Filming the attack on the Winter Palace allegedly caused more casualties than the actual event; its portrayal as the triumphant finale to the Revolution obscures the fact that it was an armed uprising by a determined minority which was followed by three years of civil war.

Also in the series are three films by Vsevolod Pudovkin. In contrast to Eisenstein, who portrayed 'the masses' as the hero, Pudovkin's heroes are individuals. In both *Mother* (1926) and *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927) the heroes achieve a commitment to revolution as a result of repression. The former, based on a novel by Maxim Gorky, is set in the 1905 revolution. In the latter, a young peasant is forced to leave the country and travel to St. Petersburg in order to find work. He finds conditions in the factories even worse than those in the country, is jailed, and spends three years in the trenches during the First World War. He returns to the city in time to witness the storming of the Winter Palace. Pudovkin's version of this event is different from Eisenstein's, briefly portraying the shelling of the palace from the St. Peter and Paul fortress and the cruiser *Aurora*. Finally, the city is renamed 'the city of Lenin'.

Pudovkin's *Storm Over Asia* (1928), originally titled *The Descent of Ghengiz Khan*, is set in Mon-

golia in 1920. It concerns a Tartar trapper called Amogalan who is cheated out of a prized silver fox fur by an American trader. After a scuffle, he is forced to flee north to join Russian partisans fighting foreign armies intervening in the Civil War. Amogalan is captured by British troops, taken out to be shot, and left for dead until an officer recognises that a talisman he was carrying proves him to be a descendant of the Mongol conqueror. He is revived by hospital treatment, and made a prince. However, the British have not recognised the anger that is building up within him, which finally erupts. The film was considered controversial enough in this country to necessitate all sub-titles referring to the British army to be altered to 'White Russian Army', but Pudovkin's telling caricatures leave us in no doubt as to his true intentions.

The collection includes two feature-length documentaries. Esfir Shub's *The Fall of the Romanoff Dynasty* (1927) charts the events leading up to the February Revolution and the abdication of Nicholas II. Shub took over a year searching through every available fragment of newsreel footage, including film taken of the royal family by a court cinematographer. This version was one re-issued in 1967 with added sound. Alternatively, there is Granada Television's acclaimed documentary *The Days That Shook the World!* (1967), which draws freely

from both documentary footage and feature films, especially *October*, to illustrate the commentary by Orson Welles.

The other Eisenstein films include his forays into mediaeval history. *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) tells the story of the Russian prince from Novgorod who defeated the Teutonic Knights at the battle of Lake Peipus in 1242. The climactic battle scene on the frozen lake is both lengthy and spectacular, and utilises thousands of extras. The knights charge in a wedge formation, but are routed and annihilated when their weight sends them crashing through the ice into the freezing water. The title rôle was taken by Nikolai Cherkasov, and the film features a memorable score by Sergei Prokofiev. The film was made at a time of uneasy relations between Russia and Germany, but was discreetly withdrawn after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, not to be seen again until the German invasion in 1941.

Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1944) starts with Ivan's coronation at the age of seventeen in 1547, and then

shows how he fulfills his pledge to become the first Tsar of all Russia. In doing so, he wages a campaign against the Tartars, culminating in the successful siege of Kazan in 1552. The second part, called *The Boyars' Plot* (1946), tells how he defeats a plot by powerful noblemen to assassinate him. Again, the title rôle is taken by Cherkasov and the music is provided by Prokofiev. The film also includes Eisenstein's first experiments with colour. Stalin fully approved of the first part; but after seeing the second, which emphasised Ivan's cruelty and despotism, he ordered changes, and cancelled the third and final part, which would have dealt with the Livonian Wars. Sadly, Eisenstein died of a heart attack before the changes could be made, and the film was withdrawn for several years.

These brief notes can hardly do justice to these landmarks in cinema history. Hendring deserve full support for their efforts in making them available on video, and it is to be hoped that this is a policy that will continue.

Stephen J. Greenhill

## THE AUCTION SCENE

In contrast with the previous few months April and May saw a number of sales, as well as the London Arms Fair which was held at the end of April.

It was interesting to note the big

increase in the number of officially de-activated firearms offered for sale at the Fair. These ranged from Vickers machine guns complete with tripods, through Tommy guns, Lee-Enfield and other rifles to a wide

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range of revolvers and self-loading pistols. Prices ranged upwards from around £60, and there seemed to be a fair amount of interest from the public.

The reactions of visitors and exhibitors to these de-acts varied — some welcomed them as another facet of collecting, others regretted that so many good working firearms had been mutilated. A third group resented their appearance, feeling that they lowered the tone of the show. It is easy to see all sides of the arguments, which are primarily matters of opinion; but more worrying was the fear expressed by some that sooner or later some idiot would commit a crime using a de-activated firearm. When this happened, it was argued that this would be seized upon by the media and used by authorities as an excuse to clamp further restrictions on shooters and the shooting sports. It is to be hoped that these fears prove groundless.

Apart from the de-acts the usual range of articles was on offer, and attendance at the Fair was up to average, with the majority of dealers expressing satisfaction with their returns. Most of the big auction houses were present, offering a preview of their approaching sales. Phillips were showing some extremely unusual pieces, such as the Fascist

Party card of Benito Mussolini, together with one of his hats. These and other items of militaria will be offered in a big sale on 29 June, which will also include a French Revolutionary banner — appropriate for the two hundredth anniversary of the fall of the Bastille.

At their sale on 4 May Phillips offered a good selection of the middle-range items, with one or two prime pieces. Japanese swords of World War II show no signs of greatly increased prices; a good example realised £150, and an NCO's made £60. Third Reich daggers were also fairly stable; an Army officer's made £130, a Luftwaffe 1937 pattern £80, an SA dagger £95, but, as always, an SS officer's dagger realised the highest figure, £850. Compared with this figure, £380 for a finely decorated Indian sword, a *khand*, seems remarkably cheap. A fine cased double-barrelled percussion howdah pistol by Robert Garden, a reminder of tiger hunts in the days of Empire, nearly equalled the SS dagger, reaching £820. English Civil War helmets are still popular with collectors: a pikeman's pot made £240, and a horseman's pot with adjustable nasal bar reached £320.

A week later Sotheby's held a combined arms, armour, militaria

and medal sale. The small section of Asiatic arms saw some good prices — an Indian musket with combined matchlock and flintlock realised £1,400 and a Ghurka kukri with a gold-mounted scabbard surprised some bidders by reaching £400. Armour — always in demand — saw strong bidding: a German black and white armour of the mid-16th century fetched £3,200; a fine close helmet, circa 1565, made £10,500; and two well-made modern armours went for £1,300 and £2,200. One of the surprises was a Maltese commemorative silver cannon of the late 19th century: estimated at £500-700, it soon passed those figures, and sold for £1,700. Cased English percussion revolvers maintained their recent high prices, ranging from £400 up to £2,000. Two Saxon parade halberds of the early 17th century went for £4,500 and £2,200.

The edged weapons section included a wide range of material, from an Italian sword of circa 1400 (£7,000) to an umbrella sword of the late 19th century (£200), but there was little interest in the more ordinary weapons such as infantry officers' swords. The small militaria section offered some very fine items including four attractive back-pouches; three of the 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons realised £280, £380

and £950. A group of tipstaves had mixed fortunes, some just failing to reach the reserves and others just exceeding them; the best, a Marshalman's tipstaff dated 1788, sold for £600.

On 5 April Christie's held an arms and armour sale at their South Kensington rooms, and one of the prime items was a Saxon dagger from the Dresden collection, which was purchased by the Royal Armouries for the hefty price of £7,500. (Incidentally, the same august institution has just purchased a superb early 18th century flintlock sporting gun by Simpson of York for the incredible price of £235,000.)

The Christie's sale included a group of spurs, not counted as the most popular of collectors' items, yet they achieved a record price of £1,300 for a very finely chiselled German early 17th century pair, and a Gothic pair made £900. One unusual piece of armour offered was a cod-piece from a black and white armour, which no doubt pleased the vendor by realising £1,100.

The major rooms have no big sales planned for the near future, but the smaller provincial rooms such as Wallis & Wallis and Weller & Duffy will be holding their regular sales.

Frederick Wilkinson

## LETTERS

### Blenheim Colours

The first article on 'Marlborough's Trophies' opens a fascinating subject, as these relics were never thoroughly recorded; and although they were eventually laid up in St. Paul's, the Rev. Sydney Smith, Canon in Residence, wrote that 'the worst depository for Flags of Triumph is a Church. Accordingly the Trophies of the Duke of Marlborough were (in the great repairs of St. Paul's in 1820) found to be utterly perished — not a rag remained'. Even the numbering of the trophies in contemporary documents is erratic.

According to War Office papers, the standards and ensigns taken at Blenheim were brought into HM Stores within the Tower of London in the December following the battle. The *Daily Courant* of 4 January 1705 said that when Blenheim Colours were taken from the Tower to Westminster Hall the standards were 'in number 38, four in a rank carried by the Private Gentlemen of the Troops of Guards'; and later came the Foot Guards, 'and in place of the pikes of these Guards, were brought the Colours, four in a rank in number 132' — thus giving a total of 170. The *London Gazette* of 1/4 January spoke of the pikemen of the Foot Guards 'to the number of 128, who had left their pikes at the Tower, carrying each one of the enemy's Colours advanced'. Obviously the miscounting of the ranks made a difference. The inventory of those in the Tower (WO/55/343) states 22 standards and 12 staves (total 34); and 83 colours and 47 staves (total 130); but in fact descrip-

tions only mentioned 75 colours and 45 staves (total 120). Another official estimate from Whitehall, 17 December 1706, give the standards as 35 and the colours as 128.

One may have hoped that the Spofforth engravings might have been more precise; but there are two versions — one in English, and the second in French which has additional information dedicating the plate to Prince George of Denmark; there are many other differences in portraits, layout and even designs of colours. A big difference is that at the top of the English version are 11 cavalry and 38 infantry staves, while the French version shows six damaged flags on the left and six more on the right, with no bare staves at all. Beside each depicted colour or standard is a number indicating how many of each there were. Thus in the French version the infantry colours number 72 plus the 10 at the top, while the English version has 74 plus 38 at the top, totalling 122 — a more acceptable total than 82. All of which underlines the difficulty of arriving at a firm number.

Although the French version shows 'Mountfort' (133) with the triangles standing on their points, the English version has the triangles resting on their broad base, which is nearer to the official Tower record — 'a white crnss, the quarters pyle of crimson and white'.

William Y. Carman  
Sutton, Surrey

### Argentine combat vests

In your article ('MI' No. 3) on the Argentine commandos in the Falklands a combat vest is depicted, and

*Drawings by Paul Hannon, from photographic references supplied by David Spencer, of the standard Argentine commando combat vest. Made rather cheaply of the same material as the fatigue uniform, in a rather brown (when new) shade of olive, the vest has a semi-open back made of two laced-together sections, partly visible under the knapsack. Note carrying handle on flap of knapsack.*



another is mentioned in passing. . . . This other vest was almost universally worn by 601 Company and seemed to be part of the issued kit. The vest closed in front by means of four evenly spaced tie strings. Each front panel consisted of (from top to bottom) an elasticated grenade pouch, a general pouch — for first aid packets, cigarettes, etc. — and two ammo pouches, basically one large pouch divided in two with a reinforced lower half. The ammo and general pouches were secured by buttoned flaps. A detachable knapsack was attached to the back of the vest by seven buttoned loops, the knapsack being closed by a three-button flap. These vests were so popular during the war that they are still issued today, to the commandos

and to some airborne troops. Other types of vest have also made their appearance since the end of the war.

On pp. 22-23 of the article Argentine camouflage trousers are depicted, with rear and cargo pockets, much like American BDUs except for being closed by a velcro-lined flap. While this pattern does exist, the more common camouflage trousers worn by the commandos during the war (and still today) are a camouflaged version of the regular OD green army combat trousers. The rear pocket is rounded instead of square, with an exposed button. The cargo pockets are not pleated and are closed by a flap with two exposed buttons.

David E. Spencer  
Bethesda, Md



British infantry platoon, from a battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, on the march near St. Pierre Torrentaine, France, 3 August 1944. A corporal section commander leads, with slung Steu gun; behind him are the Bren No. 1 (unusually, with cotton rifle clip bandoliers slung), the lance-corporal deputy section leader commanding the Bren group, and, presumably, the Bren No. 2. (Imperial War Museum B8560; photographer, Sgt. Laing)

## Bren Gunners, NW Europe, 1944-45

IAN V. HOGG & MIKE CHAPPELL

In all armies, certain weapons, vehicles, or other items of equipment acquire a reputation verging on the mythical. They become more than simply military tools for a task: soldiers invest them with a personality, and they pass into folklore. Men in battle are notoriously given to exaggeration, even superstition; but they do not build whole structures of legend around a piece of government-issue metal unless it has shown real, life-saving, battle-winning excellence in the hardest test of all. The Bren light machine gun is still regarded, by virtually every soldier who has used it in the field, with a trust and affection bordering on idolatry. In this first of an occasional series devoted to the uniforms, equipment and weaponry of the British infantryman of the Second World War we examine the gun, and its place in the infantry section.

### A NEW DOCTRINE

The aftermath of the Great War found the British infantry battalion largely dependent on rifles to provide its 'base of fire'. An inter-war battalion had three rifle companies, each of some 200 men, and one machine gun company equipped with the Vickers medium gun. Each rifle company had four platoons, each of which had

two Lewis LMG sections and two rifle sections; the battalion thus fielded 24 LMGs.

During the mid-1930s the infantry were reorganised. The Vickers guns were given back to specialised 'machine gun battalions' within each division. The battalion now had four rifle companies each of three platoons, each of three sections. The section consisted of ten men: a cor-

poral section leader personally supervising a 'rifle group' of six riflemen, and the lance-corporal second-in-command leading an LMG group of two men. With the minimal headquarters the platoon now fielded 36 men; and the battalion had 36 LMGs. LMG firepower was thus increased by 50%, and manpower was cut by about the same ratio.

Thus, at the outbreak of the Second World War, with the rifles actually 'written down' in training pamphlets as supplementary weapons,<sup>(1)</sup> a battalion of around 400 men armed with 36 LMGs were expected to deliver the firepower equivalent to that of a 1918 battalion of 800 men with 24 LMGs and 700-plus rifles. The theory behind this reorganisation had been devised by senior officers with extensive combat experience in the later stages of the Great War; they knew, from shocking personal memories, the dominating value of a good light machine gun in the infantry battle, and now organised the infantry arm to take the best advantage of it. (The reduction in manpower also made the company much

easier to command, transport, and manoeuvre.) When war broke out, a great deal was riding upon the soundness of this new tactical concept built around the firepower potential of the LMG, and upon the choice of weapon.

The degree to which the theorists 'got it right' may be judged by the degree to which infantry organisation and tactics changed during and immediately after the Second World War: i.e. not at all. As the theorists had predicted, the selected LMG – the Bren gun – delivered enough firepower to enable the infantry to fight their way on to their objectives; and the platoon proved well organised to back up the LMGs, manoeuvring under cover of their fire. It can be argued that firepower beat the enemy in the Second World War, as manpower had beaten them in the Great War. If this argument has substance, then, from the viewpoint of the British infantry, the Bren must be considered a true war-winner.

### PROCUREMENT AND PRODUCTION

At various dates in the 1920s and early 1930s comparative trials of quite a wide range of British and foreign LMG designs were arranged. In 1930 the definitive decision was taken to replace the Vickers MMG and Lewis LMG in the infantry battalion with one weapon capable of fulfilling both rôles. The parent design of the weapon

<sup>(1)</sup>The light machine gun is the principle fire producing weapon of the section. The rifle is not only the personal weapon of the rifleman for use in an emergency, or for augmenting the fire of the light machine gun, but it enables the rifleman by accurate shooting to "snipe" individual enemy.

*Bren Mk.I, with main features indicated. The carrying handle could be locked out in a straight line, by means of an internal spring catch, to form a pistol grip pointing down and to the left. The bipod folded flat, either forwards or backwards. The position of the magazine catch made instant magazine changes easy; with a single sweep of the hand the catch could be tripped and the magazine removed. It was good practice to slide the cocking handle forward and fold it down after cocking the gun. Essential specification: Calibre, .303in.; system of operation, gas, selective fire; length, 45.5in.; barrel length, 25in.; feed, 30-round box or 100-round drum magazine; front sights, blade with ears; rear sights, aperture with radial drum; weight, 22lb. 2oz.; muzzle velocity, 2,440 fps; cyclic rate, 500 rpm.*



#### Right:

*Bren Mk.IV; the Mk.II body, shorter barrel, and simplified bipod are evident. Weight was reduced to 19lb. 2oz., about the minimum compatible with the stresses imposed by the Mk.VII cartridge. Note the dark steel barrel, with only the gas regulator assembly in stainless finish.*

finally selected was the Czech-made Zb26.

The Czechs, faced with the task of constructing a new country and all that went with it, began a great deal of weapons development for their new army in the 1920s, though hampered by financial constraints. The Zb light machine gun moved through a succession of designers, designs, factories and prototypes before emerging as a working weapon in the hands of troops in 1928. More modifications led to improved models; and in 1930 the British military attaché in Prague drew the attention of the Small Arms Committee to the Zb26. The weapon supplied for initial trials was the slightly modified Zb27; after extensive tests it was pronounced 'outstanding', but prototypes with some further modifications were requested.

The Zb was chambered for the rimless 7.92mm Mauser cartridge. It had a deeply 'finned' barrel to assist cooling which, in practice, collected dirt and oil which burned off during firing to give an impenetrable heat haze on the sight line. The

British, of course, wanted it in .303 Lee-Enfield chambering, and rejected the finned barrel. Changing the calibre demanded some redesign, and advantage was taken of the opportunity to introduce some other improvements. The magazine became curved, to accommodate the rimmed .303 cartridge; the gas cylinder was shortened, and the take-off point for gas moved back down the barrel to suit the British propellant; and a soft buffer was added which allowed the barrel and body to move rearwards on firing to reduce the 'felt' recoil. The resulting design, known as the Zb33, was finally accepted after extensive trials in 1934. The name 'Bren' was a combination of 'Brno' – the town where the original gun was manufactured by Csekoslovenska Zbrojovka Akciova Spolnost – and 'Enfield', where the British version would be built by the Royal Small Arms Factory.

Drawings were received, and converted to Imperial measurements, in 1935; the production line was set up, and the first British-made Bren was completed in September 1937. By the outbreak of war two years later production was running at 400 a week. By June 1940 more than 30,000 had been deli-

vered; but after the disastrous Battle of France and the withdrawal from Dunkirk only about 2,300 remained in England. The single production line – hideously vulnerable to enemy air raids – worked flat out to take up the slack, but in the months of the 'invasion scare' thousands of old Lewis aircraft guns had to be hastily taken out of store and issued as a stop-gap. However, by 1943 production had reached 1,000 a week. In 1940 production was also started by John Inglis of Toronto, Canada, and later by Lithgow in Australia. By 1943 some 60% of Bren production was in fact Canadian.

The original Mark I Bren was a splendid weapon, but too luxurious for wartime mass-production. It had an elegant drum-set rear sight; the gas regulator/flash hider/front sight assembly was a one-piece machined stainless steel unit; the butt had a strap which went over the shoulder, and a rear handle beneath, for the firer's left hand; and the bipod had telescoping adjustable legs. The Mark II, which appeared in June 1941, simplified much of this. The rear sight became a simple leaf-type 'ladder'; the barrel group became a three-piece assembly with only the

gas regulator in stainless steel; the strap and rear handle were removed from the butt; and the bipod legs were of fixed length – changes which actually increased the weight slightly. There were also some minor differences in the body; the Mark III of July 1944 reverted to the original Mark I body, but kept the other Mark II features, and had a shortened barrel; the Mark IV of the same date had the Mark II body but the shorter barrel. The Marks III and IV were thus rather lighter and handier, and it was generally held – though on uncertain authority – that they were designed for use in the Far East.

#### IN THE FIELD

There is one foolproof way of finding out what a soldier thinks of any weapon: watching to see whether, in action, he dumps it and looks for something better. And while British soldiers were ready to ditch their revolvers for P38 pistols, and their Stens for practically anything, the authors have never heard of a Bren being ditched. It was, without doubt, the finest light machine gun of its day<sup>(2)</sup>: reliable, accurate, simple, robust – all the qualities designers hope for, and only sometimes achieve, came together in the Bren.

The affinity for the Bren displayed by its 'No.1s' was remarkable. They had more weight to carry than any other member of the section, and they knew that they

<sup>(2)</sup> 'Light machine gun' is used advisedly – a direct comparison with the general purpose MG34 or MG42 is false



would draw enemy fire as soon as they themselves 'opened up', yet most would not be parted from the gun under any circumstances. Perhaps they knew that theirs was the chance to deliver the telling firepower. Mike Chappell recalls a 5ft. 3in. Bren No.1, in the exhausting climate and terrain of the Far East, who would not let anyone else carry his Bren. In time the left side of the gun was polished to an almost 'chromed' finish by constant rubbing against his body on the march; when told that it would be taken in for blueing, he went berserk, and declared that the Army could do what it liked when he was finished with the gun, but not before.

#### Offensive tactics

Infantry tactical doctrine called for the Brens of a rifle company to engage the enemy in the fire-fight that followed an advance to contact. Minor tactics at section and platoon level were based on fire and movement to close with the enemy, once the fire-fight had been won, with groups and sections moving in bounds.

Assume a section to be advanced, and coming under fire. They would immediately go to ground; the Bren group would crawl off and find a suitable location from which to take the enemy under fire with the LMG and the rifles of the other two men. Once this suppressive fire was keeping the enemy's heads down, the rifle group moved around the rear of the Bren group in a circling movement, took up a position closer to the enemy, and opened fire. The Bren group then circled round them, took up a closer position, and opened fire – and so on, leap-frogging until the rifle group were close enough to leap up and dash into the target area with rifle-fire from the hip, grenades, and bayonets, the Bren group covering them with fire until the last possible minute.

For a platoon attack, the point section became the fire section, usually with an additional Bren group and the fire

from the platoon's 2in. mortar providing HE and smoke. The remaining two sections manoeuvred in bounds, again using fire and movement, to a flanking assault position.

It sounds simple; it *was* simple – so simple that everybody understood it and could make it work. This sequence is, of course, the basis of all military manoeuvre in the face of the enemy, whether by a rifle section or an armoured division. This simple fire-and-movement exercise, which could be modified to fit practically any situation, was actually taught from scratch as a parade ground drill – 'Battle Drill' – which, once understood, was simply translated into an instinctive field manoeuvre. At the parade ground stage it could, however, reduce an audience to helpless laughter . . .

#### Battle Drill

On to a limitless expanse of asphalt march ten men, in step, arms swinging, rifles at the slope. The instructor bawls 'Under Fire!': the men halt, face the enemy, order arms, and stand at ease. Then, in unison, they shout 'Down, Crawl, Observe, Fire!' and snap to attention. 'Rifle group, follow me!' – and on the word 'Fire' they snap to attention, which indicates that they are firing. The section commander gives his stereotyped orders: 'Rifle group engage; right flanking; Bren group over there!' The Bren group stand at ease (no longer firing), turn right, and double off to the flank; they halt, turn to face the enemy; 'Down, Crawl, Observe,

Fire!'; and snap to attention. 'Rifle group, follow me!' shouts the section commander; they stand at ease to show they have stopped firing, and double off behind the commander, around behind the Bren group. They halt – and go through the whole rigmarole again. Finally, having reached the last position, the section commander orders 'Charge!'. Away go the riflemen, rifles at the hip, bayonets fixed, and shouting (officially . . .) 'Bullets, Bullets, Bullets!' to show that they are firing.

It sounds ludicrous; but it impressed the system in the mind, until civilians-in-uniform could be relied upon to snap into it when cold, tired, scared, disoriented, and under real fire from real enemies. (It is over 45 years since Ian Hogg did Battle Drill, but it has stayed firmly in place.)

#### Defensive tactics

In the defence, infantry dug into a series of platoon localities, each featuring all-round defence, and with the Brens carefully sited for the support of flanking sections with their fire interlocking. Tripods were brought up, and a proportion of the Brens were mounted on them for 'fixed line' shoots (targets registered in daylight so that they could be covered at night, in fog or smoke). In the pre-war years all Brens were provided with a tripod, of surpassing complexity, which could be set up in different ways for ground and anti-aircraft use. In neither rôle was it particularly popular; traverse was limited, and the 20lb. tripod

was an additional burden. In practice, chocking the gun with a couple of sandbags, and/or lashing it to a stake, was almost as effective. By 1942 only one tripod for every three guns was even provided. One disadvantage of using the Bren defensively at night was its very visible muzzle flash.

#### FIRING THE BREN

Firing the Bren was a pleasure. The soft buffer reduced the recoil to a gentle shove, much less abrupt than that of the Lee-Enfield rifle. The bipod held it steady on target, though it naturally vibrated when firing on automatic. The only slight annoyance was a tendency for it to 'walk away from you' during prolonged bursts; due to the balance between the return spring and the buffer, the closing of the bolt tended to push the gun slightly forward. This was necessary, as it was the final movement of the gas piston going forward which locked the bolt and struck the firing pin, and it therefore needed a fairly smart blow in the forward direction.

For similar reasons, the first shot was often inaccurate until you learned how to control the gun. The Bren fired from an open bolt; when the

*Douet, near Bayeux, 11 June 1944: the classic Normandy photograph of a Bren being fired by Pte. Weatley of A Coy., 6th Bn., Durham Light Infantry, 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division. (IWM B5382; Sgt. Laing)*







Sniper-hunting in the village of Faub-de-Vancelles, near Caen, 19 June 1944; section commander and Bren No.1 from the Highland Light Infantry of Canada, 3rd Canadian Div., trade a dangerously exposed fire position right up against a window for a better close-range field of fire. (IWM B7749; Sgt. Laing)

#### Right:

Ptes. Wingate and Bailey, a Bren team from an unidentified unit of 43rd (Wessex) Division, photographed in a slit trench on the outskirts of Auholt, about seven miles east of the Rhine, on 29 March 1945, during fighting with German airborne units. The Fallschirmjäger apparently do not impress this pair sufficiently for them to resist the urge to 'brew up'. Beside the gun the No.2's utility pouches are carefully arranged, one open for instant access to the magazines. (IWM BU2834; Sgt. Ames)



'walking away.'

The Bren was intrinsically an extremely accurate weapon, and very effective for aimed fire out to 600 to 800 yards, particularly if 'sink' could be observed; and in practice this was about as far as infantry small arms needed to be effective.

It was easier to qualify as an LMG marksman than as a rifle marksman. A good shot could deliver a rapid succession of aimed shots, with the change lever set on 'R' for 'rounds', with extraordinary accuracy. For 'bursts' practices on the range change levers were set to 'A' for 'automatic'; but in fact, most practices could be fired in the time allowed by flicking the

trigger to produce single, aimed shots. Since good shooting meant higher pay, this trick was often resorted to.

Bursts – two or three rounds out to intermediate range, and about five rounds for longer range – were less accurate; they were intended to 'cone' the weapon's fire. Automatic fire was at a steady, chugging rate of 480 to 540 rpm, which was economical of ammunition. (A whole magazine of 28 rounds might be fired in one burst in the anti-aircraft rôle or on fixed lines at night.) A clever No.1 could actually 'play a tune' on the Bren, to signal a tactical bound or some other movement.

**Reconstruction: Bren No.1 and No.2 of 7th Bn. Duke of Wellington's Regiment, 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division, North-West Europe, autumn 1944.** Formed as a first-line Territorial division on the outbreak of war, the 49th did not go to France with the BEF; elements were sent piecemeal to Norway in 1940, and after withdrawal the division spent two years as garrison troops in Iceland – thus the polar bear divisional sign. Landing in Normandy on 12 June, the division saw heavy fighting; at that time its infantry units were: 70 Bde. 10th & 11th Durham Light Inf., 1st Tyne-side Scottish; 146 Bde. 4th Lincolnshire Regt., 1/4th King's Own Yorkshire Light Inf., 1st Lancashire Bn. of York & Lancaster Regt.; 147 Bde. 11th Royal Scots Fusiliers, 6th & 7th Duke of Wellington's Regiment. The division fought around Fontenay-le-Pesnel and Rauray, 25 June to 1 July, and were severely handled by elements of 12th SS Pz. Div. 'Hitlerjugend', the Panzer-Lehr Div., and 2nd SS Pz. Div. 'Das Reich'. From 6 July the mauled 6DWR were withdrawn and replaced in 147 Bde. by 1st Leicestershire Regt.; and on 20 August 70 Bde. were withdrawn and replaced by 56 Bde.; 2nd South Wales Borderers, 2nd Gloucestershire Regt., 2nd Essex Regiment. During the autumn the 49th Div. fought on the Scheldt, and from November came under 1st Canadian Army for the bitter winter campaign which eventually liberated the Netherlands.

The uniforms and equipment are described on pp.18-19; the gun illustrated is a Canadian light-made Mk.II dated 1944.

trigger was pressed the bolt ran forward to chamber a round, lock the breech, and fire. The movement of the heavy bolt and gas piston caused a shift in the balance of the gun which, unless you were ready for it, threw your aim off. Some gunners, if they expected to be in position for some time, would drive a couple of cartridges through the holes in the bipod feet to 'nail' the bipod to the ground and prevent it

No recruit, after his first 'rapid' shoot, could be unaware of the firepower of the Bren. To watch 12 guns fire off a timed rapid practice on a gallery range was an unforgettable experience which never palled. To watch the guns of a platoon engage a target on a field firing exercise left you in no doubt where the platoon's true firepower potential lay. Although firing the same Mk.VII ammunition as the rifle, and at the same muzzle velocity of 2,440 fps, the Bren gave Mike Chappell the subjective impression of having greater hitting power. He saw it knock chunks out of tree trunks and dig earth, at close quarters; and the wounds it inflicted at close range were horrific. He himself came under the fire of Brens twice,









A Bren No.1 of 5th Bn., Coldstream Guards, 32 Guards Brigade, Guards Armoured Division, covers the advance into Arras on 1 September 1944. His fire position vividly demonstrates the Bren's handiness: it could be moved, set up and brought into action anywhere a rifle could, and without exposing the No.1 any more than a rifleman. (IWM BU245; Sgt. Laing)

both times uncomfortably close; and can vouch for the irresistible urge to take cover, and never leave it.

### Stoppages

The mechanical reliability of the Bren was legendary. It continued to operate in rain, sand, mud, or after total immersion. By far the most usual reason for its stopping firing was simply that the magazine was empty, or malfunctioning. The magazine, being made of fairly light metal stampings, was potentially vulnerable to damage in

the field; and, as with any automatic firing rimmed ammunition, would jam if each round was not loaded with the rim in front of that below it.

There were three simple 'Immediate Actions' which were learned as instinctive drills. The first was 'Gun Stops Firing': response – cock the gun, remove the magazine, put on a new one, resume firing. Second came 'Gun Does Not Fire': cock, remove magazine, fingers into breech to remove any jammed cartridge or case, clear, replace magazine, resume firing. Third was 'Gun Fires a Few Rounds and Stops': cock, magazine off, unlock barrel, push it forward. The No.2 then crawls alongside, changes the gas regulator to the next largest hole (usually by levering it round with a bulletted cart-



ridge) and reports it done; you then replace the barrel, replace the magazine, and resume firing. (This ability to increase the power of the gun, to compensate for 'carboning up', dirt in the mechanism, or any other cause of the rate of fire dropping, was extremely useful.) If none of these 'IAs' did the trick, you were in trouble, and faced dismantling the gun; in most cases the problem turned out to be either a broken firing pin or a broken extractor, and the crew carried spares of both. Replacement of either took less than a minute; but was a rare event.

### Changing barrels

Each Bren came with two barrels, to ensure cooling (though in fact Mike Chappell never in 22 years of soldiering saw a barrel fail through overheating, he saw them glow cherry-red after continuous rapid fire.) Each barrel was numbered to the gun; and, sight adjustment being by the front sight, each was carefully zeroed to its gun. The spare barrel was carried by the No.2, and was supposed to be fitted periodically; recommended intervals varied between once every six and once every ten magazines, the former if firing at a continuous rate of 120 rounds (four magazines) per

minute. As the moment drew near the No.1 yelled 'Change barrel!' to his No.2 to warn him to get the spare out of its bag and make a quick check that it was serviceable. He would then crawl up beside the gun, and wait. On the shout of 'Change!' the No.1 unlocked the barrel latch, grabbed the carrying-handle, pushed the barrel free, swung it to the left, and dropped it. Meanwhile the No.2 slid the new barrel into place, checked that the gas regulator had engaged the front of the gas cylinder properly, and called 'Home!' or 'In!'; the No.1 then slapped down the locking latch and carried on firing. No.2 then had to crawl round behind No.1, retrieve the old barrel, and, if things were looking lively, find some way of cooling it. It did a red-hot barrel no harm to be dropped into a stream; wet grass helped, if nothing else offered; and in the desert, where things were a little more difficult, Nature has been known to provide. The barrel change could easily be achieved in six or seven seconds under almost any conditions.

### Stripping

The basic field strip was, like every other aspect of this most 'user-friendly' weapon, simplicity itself; and, unlike





the case with the Great War Lewis, all soldiers in the section were easily trained to handle and care for the Bren. For a demonstration or a bet the Bren could be specially 'set up' so that it virtually fell apart with a couple of taps; but even average soldiers under battle conditions seldom took more than half a minute.

The basic steps are: (1) Remove magazine, clear the gun, ensure all moving parts are forward. (2) With the nose of a bullet, push body locking pin through from left to right. (3) Hold the body with the left hand, and withdraw the butt group as far as possible. (4) Hold the return spring rod out of alignment to the left; with the right hand pull the cocking handle sharply back. (5) Lift piston and breechblock out of gun, and slide them apart. (6) Unlatch barrel locking nut, and remove barrel. (7) Lift latch to the vertical, and release nut by pushing stud in front of sliding magazine port cover. (8) Slide bipod collar off front of gas cylinder.

No additional stripping was necessary for normal maintenance.

\* \* \*

The Bren stayed in use with the British Army, in its original .303 form, as long as



the Army used the .303 rifle. With the change to the 7.62mm NATO cartridge the hunt was on for a new light machine gun; but it was eventually decided that none of the alternatives showed sufficient advance over the Bren to justify their adoption, and existing Brens were simply converted to the new calibre and round. The resulting L4 light machine gun is still in limited service, despite the adoption of the GPMG as the section automatic weapon in the 1960s. It is issued for tropical service; it saw action, particularly in the hands of the Royal Marine Commandos, in the Falklands War of 1982; and, despite the recent appearance of the 5.56mm Light Support Weapon, it seems entirely possible that in some rôles the Bren may still be with us into the 21st century.

#### Centre:

*Operation 'Ipsom', 26 June 1944: early that morning, a section from 12 Platoon, B Coy., 6th Bn., Royal Scots Fusiliers take cover in a typical Normandy lane during the advance by 44 Bde., 15th (Scottish) Division. Between 0730hrs. and 0845hrs. the attack by 6RSF on the village of St. Mauvieu, south of Norrey-en-Bessin, was recorded by a war photographer, Maj. Stewart. The village was secured, but at a cost to B Coy. of 50% casualties, including the company commander Maj. Agnew, 12 Ptn.'s commander Lt. Robertson, and a section commander. This level of loss was nothing unusual during the slaughter of Allied infantry in Normandy. Here we see a Bren team set up with the clearest available line of fire; beyond the No.1 (who has his 'camouflage face veil' spread over his small pack) the section corporal is identifiable by his chevrons, Sten, and machete. (IWM B5959; Maj. Stewart)*

#### Above:

*Arras, 1 September 1944: 5th Coldstream advance into the town. The No.1, carrying his Bren unslung at the 'port arms', is no weakling; at more than 24lb. with a full magazine, it is a substantial load. The top carrying handle is convenient and well-placed for balance; but when 'tactical' the gun was more often carried with a sling round the neck or shoulders, assault-style. The Bren sling was, officially, about a third longer than the otherwise identical rifle sling, but the latter was often used. Two sturdy sprung 'dog-lead' clips engaged with the butt bar and – on many guns – with a ring on the left side of the bipod collar. Some guns did not have this ring, and the clip had to be attached rather awkwardly to part of the bipod. The No.2 carries the 'hog-leg' holdall; he has a 'pick GS' on his back under the small pack. (IWM BU254; Sgt. Laing)*

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King, Tom Reeves, Darren Steed, Ian Steed, Mick Tolhurst, and Dick Windrow.



**Reconstruction: Bren gun No.1 of 7DWR, 147 Bde., 49th Div., autumn 1944.** The Cap General Service (this example dated 1945; A. & J. Gelfer, Glasgow) began to replace the Cap, Field Service in September 1943 and by D-Day was almost universal as the campaign headgear of line infantry. The wartime regimental cap badge of the 'Duke's', in silver-grey plastic, is pined through a scarlet backing recalling the old 33rd Regiment's pre-1881 facing colour. The Battledress, 1940 pattern (this example dated Dec. 1942; Steinberg & Sons Ltd.) is worn open-necked, with a Camouflage Face Veil in brown and green net as a scarf. The Jerkin, Leather No.2 (this example dated Dec. 1942, M. Steingold & Co.) was almost universal cold weather issue in NW Europe. The

Mk.II steel helmet (this example dated 1939) has an original paint finish in matt greyish green; it is covered here with a drawstring camouflage net in dark brown and green, the mesh approximately .35in.; a shell dressing (this example dated January 1939; Johnson & Johnson (GB) Ltd.) is carried inside the net on the right side, above the slipknot securing the drawstring.

The regimental designation 'Duke of Wellington's' is worn immediately below the shoulder seams, in the white-on-scarlet of line infantry, and in the printed form prescribed under ACI 905 of 12 June 1943. Below it the printed divisional sign surmounts the three scarlet infantry arm-of-service strips identifying the third brigade within the division; both insignia are sewn to a khaki serge patch which is then

sewn in one piece to the sleeve. On the left forearm is the buff-embroidered 'LG' light machine gun skill-at-arms badge, which retained the obsolete acronym for 'Lewis Gun'. On the right forearm is a block of three red service chevrons, one for each year's service, printed on drill cloth, as authorised under ACI 233 of 16 February 1944. The degree to which insignia were worn on BD in the front lines varied very widely, and photographic evidence suggests every possible variation between complete sets and none at all.

Pattern 1937 web equipment Battle Order is worn here: belt, shoulder braces, two basic pouches each holding two Bren magazines, entrenching tool, water-bottle in the carrier provided for Field Service Marching Order, and haversack or 'small pack'. The 1943

Respirator, Light, Anti-Gas is slung on the left hip in its case; and, precariously to the Bren No.1, the gun's Wallet, Spare Parts is slung here to hang on the thigh. This contained a combination tool, a pull-through, oil can, and tin container of spare parts. Most webbing items illustrated here are dated between 1941 and 1943.

By mid-1944 it was unusual, though not unknown, for a soldier to carry both the ribbed ground-sheet/raincape and the Cape, Anti-Gas, No.1, Camouflaged with Battle Order; either one could serve as a waterproof, though neither of them very efficiently. This soldier has the anti-gas cape, tied by its tapes to the top of his small pack.







**Reconstruction: Bren gun No.2, autumn 1944.** This particular example of the Mk.II helmet, dated 1939, has an original paint finish in semi-gloss 'milk chocolate' brown; this is wholly obscured by a full set of 'garnish' – a rough hessian cover made from a sandbag, a green drawstring camouflage net with a mesh of approximately 1in., strips of dyed hessian scrim, and a horizontal string, loosely looped, for addition of foliage. This shell dressing is dated November 1940; Southall (Birmingham) Ltd. Over his BD the No.2 wears, for warmth, his Overalls, Denim (the blouse in this example dated 1945, J. W. Campbell Ltd., Belfast, the trousers 1943, C. H. Bernard & Sons Ltd). Denims were not carried in his pack by the individual soldier, and when issue took place it seems to have been at unit level. He also wears issue khaki wool gloves, the universal 'Anklets, Web', and hobnailed 'ammunition boots'.

Variations from the No.1's kit include the No.4 rifle (this example a Canadian Long Branch-made Mk.I\* dated 1942) and its spike bayonet, with steel scabbard in a web belt frog; the No.2 and the lance-corporal Bren group com-

mander both carried rifles. The No.2 carries 50 rounds of 303 ammunition in clips in a cotton bandolier, worn apron-fashion, for his own use. Slung on a broad neck strap and fastened with a narrow chest strap are a pair of utility pouches. Each of these, and each of his basic pouches, accommodates two Bren magazines. In theory the No.2 was supposed to exchange empty magazines from the utility pouches for the two full magazines carried by each member of the rifle group. The lance-corporal also carried four magazines, so the Bren group had 13 magazines immediately available (counting the one carried on the gun), and another 12 for collection from riflemen in action if required.

The No.2 also carried the Bren's holdall, containing the spare barrel, cleaning rod, bottle of cold weather oil, bottle of graphited grease, cleaning brushes and mop, and fouling tool. It was an awkward item to carry slung when in full field kit – we have photographed it here from both sides on alternative shoulders – and photos suggest that it was not infrequently discarded, its contents being distributed somehow around the rest of the team's equipment and pockets. The spare



barrel is often seen carried thrust across under the flap of the small pack, where the protruding handle and gas regulator held it securely.

Finally, the No.2 and lance-corporal would normally carry either a shovel or a pickaxe; these were carried in a number of ways attached to or thrust under the equipment. This example of the Shovel, GS (marked 'Brades/1942') is the smaller of at least two alternative

patterns, with an 8in. wide head with forward-turned shoulders.

This soldier carries the rubberised groundsheet – in fact, configured as a buttoning raincape with a collar – folded in the regulation manner into the top of his small pack. Both brown and white enamel mugs were issued, and were often carried on the pack straps.

**MI**



# Redcoat:

## The Regimental Coat of the British Infantryman, c 1808-15 (1)

G. A. STEPLER

Marshal Bugeaud recalled the appearance of the British infantry he had faced during the Peninsular War: '... the English, silent and impassive, with ordered arms, loomed like a red wall; their aspect was imposing ...'. His image and others like it have been enduring; and the uniforms of the stolid infantrymen whom the Marshal held in such regard have long been a popular subject of study, illustration and reconstruction. Yet for all the effort expended, there remains much to be discovered and explained. It is extraordinary, for instance, that until the appearance of this article an authentic surviving example of a Line ranker's coat of the period has never, to our knowledge, been the subject of a published colour photograph in an English-language publication.

While today the surviving regimental coats and jackets of officers are frequently encountered, those of the other ranks are rare indeed – and yet the scale of production of military clothing in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars was unequalled before the First World War. A private soldier who was discharged either kept his regimental coat or, if not entitled to it at the time of his discharge, left it with his regiment to be handed on to new recruits. Regimental coats were good, substantial items of clothing; and, as few who had served in the ranks could afford not to make use of them in their new civilian lives, they were worn until literally worn out. If they were not kept by the ex-soldier himself, there seems also to have been a ready market for used military dress.

*'The Ruddle Pit' (George Walker's Costume of Yorkshire, 1814). A former soldier at work in his regimental coat – a rare depiction of the fate of so much of the common soldier's clothing. Although offering little useful detail, it is worth noting the overall impression of a tight, almost too close-fitting jacket. (Courtesy P. J. Haythornthwaite)*

Indeed, it would seem that of the handful of other ranks' coats which still survive, none of them were actually given out to and worn by soldiers.<sup>(1)</sup>

This extremely poor rate of survival has left us with little tangible evidence of the actual appearance of the private soldier's regimentals. The work of early 19th century artists offers some of the missing detail, but, as is well known, it can be as misleading as it is helpful. The same might well be said of the surviving coats. A closer look can tell us a great deal, but only if set against a wider knowledge of the army's method of procurement and of the difficulties of large-scale production before the advent of the sewing machine and the universal acceptance of the tailor's tape measure.

### COLONELS AND CLOTHIERS

Each year on 25 December the private soldier was entitled to a new regimental coat, which, with certain other items of clothing due annually, was furnished by the clothing contractor engaged by his colonel. The military clothiers who supplied such regimental cloth-



ing were concentrated in London and Dublin, those in the former providing clothing for regiments on the British Establishment, those in the latter for regiments carried on the Irish Establishment. Taking full account of the time needed to make and ship each year's clothing meant that preparations had to begin well in advance. The process of preparing the clothing which was to be worn, say, in 1812, began in the early months of the preceding year, 1811. In London, on an appointed day, the colonel's clothier would have his proposed patterns for the ensuing year brought to a small house in Westminster, where they would be inspected by the general officers of the army's Clothing Board.

It was the duty of the Board to ensure that any clothing made for soldiers conformed to existing regulations. To fulfill this charge the members scrutinised the patterns shown to them, being particularly careful over the quality of the materials, but also noting the details of cut and ornamentation, workmanship and size. Approved patterns were sealed, and it then fell to the

clothier to have made enough coats, and other items, conformable to 'the sealed pattern'. When the clothing was complete, a final check was made at the clothier's warehouse by two military officers appointed as Inspectors of Clothing. If approved the batch was given a 'View Certificate', and was then sent on to be packed and shipped to the colonel's regiment, hopefully to arrive in time for the commencement of the new clothing year.

The clothier himself was a man of business and his position in the trade afforded him the opportunity of considerable profits. The actual task of making up the clothing was sub-contracted to tailors, who in turn might themselves let contracts. With the enormous increase in demand for military clothing during the Napoleonic Wars, much work eventually found its way into very unskilled hands.

Poorly paid and needy female labour, in particular, was exploited in what was then called 'the contract-system' and later became loosely known as 'sweating'. By splitting up the work into small tasks, each of which was easily learned, it was

<sup>(1)</sup>Superior numerals refer to notes at the end of this article.



possible to use people with no previous training and who were generally willing to work for lower wages than a properly apprenticed tailor might expect. In 1813 one group of wretched women at Covent Garden were reported to earn but 5d. a day for making soldiers' coats – when a journeyman soldier-tailor, working for his regiment, could expect 2d. for making a pair of shoulder straps, and a shilling for a coat. Quality in the clothier's product was bound to suffer.

### THE QUARTERMASTER'S TROUBLES

Packed in bales and casks, the regiment's clothing began an often arduous journey to its eventual owners. Even short journeys could be hazardous, and if destined for remote colonial stations the clothing could be many weeks at sea, at the mercy not only of nature but also of the enemy. Nonetheless, Britain's soldiers could count themselves fortunate, for their nation's immense wealth and her strength at sea put them among the best supplied and equipped soldiers of their age. This could not, of course, protect them from the privations inherent in active campaigning and distant service, and the many references to the ragged and patched appearance of Wellington's regiments are well known – nor were those who fought at Waterloo entirely immune. But where such problems arose from the belated arrival, or non-arrival, of the annual clothing, the soldier could at least expect an eventual compensation.

Upon the arrival of the clothing at the regiment, the quartermaster and his sergeant assessed any damage. They would be glad enough to find the clothing 'quite dry' and in reasonably good order. Water damage could occur easily, even on the shortest journey, and poor packing and careless handling could make everything much worse. In 1816, as a result of a short passage to Cambrai, one battalion of the Cold-



stream Guards lost 17 coats, 13 waistcoats, 6 pairs of trousers and 36 shakos, 'so much damaged by water as to render them Totally unfit to deliver to the Men as new'. In another bale three coats were so 'very much chafed and large holes cut thro . . . as to render them totally useless'<sup>(2)</sup>. It fell to the quartermaster to minimize the loss to the regiment, and to improvise where he could not replace.

Whatever else had to be done to the clothing, its arrival signalled the start of the onerous task of actually fitting the men with their new garments. The annual expenses of every soldier always included a charge for 'altering his clothing to make it fit'. For a short period just before the outbreak of war with revolutionary France,

colonels had been free to have their regimental clothing sent 'in Piece' (i.e. in materials), together with a pattern coat approved by the Clothing Board. From the standpoint of fitting the clothing to the soldier, this was considered much more satisfactory than having to alter clothing which was already made up, for it was 'necessarily taken to pieces and made up afresh, that it may fit the men'<sup>(3)</sup>. War, however, necessitated the shipment of ready-made clothing. In 1794 the liberty to send the annual clothing 'in piece' was withdrawn, although wherever possible regiments continued to request items 'in piece', especially breeches. As explained by Sir John Moore, those 'made by the Clothiers never can be alter'd so as to fit the Men comfortably'<sup>(4)</sup>.

Bottolion Company, 9th (East Norfolk) Regiment; coat (1) in our listing; Musée Royal de l'Armée, Bruxelles. The 1/9th took part in the Coronado and Wolcheren campaigns in 1808 and 1809. In 1810 it returned to the Iberian Peninsula, where it remained on service until withdrawn in 1814 and sent briefly to Canada. In June 1815 the Bottolion returned to Europe, missing Waterloo but remaining in France for several years as part of the army of occupation. A second battalion (raised in 1799 and re-formed in 1804) arrived in Portugal in 1808, and continued in the Peninsula (principally at Gibraltar) until being sent home in 1813, where it was disbanded at the end of 1815.

The buttons bear a '9' beneath a crown, the whole surrounded by a closed circle. A similar, undated button is in the Portyn Collection of the National Army Museum. The irregular lace on the upper edge of the collar may be a substitution by the clothier's subcontractor when his supply of proper lace ran out. The proper lace had two black stripes, now faded to brown. Fittings, yellow. (Photograph Musée Royal de l'Armée, Bruxelles)

Regimental coats were supplied in sizes graded according to height and 'stoutness', but too often it seemed as though there was in fact only one size – too small! The Foot Guards in particular had difficulties with coats that were none too generous in cut. The Coldstream, being 'composed of much Stouter Men, and of a higher Standard than those of the Line' on several occasions received clothing which was quite inadequate. Almost 200 of the coats received by the 1st Battalion in southern France in 1814 were found to be 'too small to be fitted to any of the men'. Even after much cutting up and resewing there remained '160 Coats, all 5ft 6in small, not a man in the Battn as they will fit'. Attempts to avoid the usual trouble over fitting, by



sending in beforehand 'Measures' of the men, did not necessarily produce the desired result. The use of the tape measure was in its infancy, and suppliers commonly insisted on a height only, matched simply to 'small, middling or large'.

The quartermaster could also expect a certain amount of missing or damaged lace, missing buttons, weak seams and poor sewing. His troubles are again graphically illustrated by the Coldstream, whose 2nd Battalion, in 1816,

*Battalion Company, 26th (Cameronians) Regiment; coat (2); Musée Royal de l'Armée, Bruxelles. The 1/26th saw service in 1808 and 1809 in Spain and on the Walcheren expedition. In 1811 it was sent to Portugal and in 1812 arrived at Gibraltar, where it remained until withdrawn in 1822. A second battalion, raised in 1803, passed the war in Ireland and Scotland, being disbanded in Scotland in 1814.*

*Two similar, but not identical coats survive from this regiment. Their provenance is not clear. This one has lost all of its buttons, except those for the shoulder straps. The rear view shows that the pocket flaps have a functional button which is omitted on the other extant coat of the 26th, coat (4). (Photograph Musée Royal de l'Armée, Bruxelles)*

received a consignment of shako covers in such 'an unfinished state' that some had 'the Holes work'd thro for the feather and some without any'. The strings of the covers were supposed to tie at the right side, 'instead of which some are made so as to bring the strings some to the right, some to the left, some before & some behind'. Worse still, many of the covers were 'too short by an Inch & some more'. Six tailors had to be set to work to correct the faults. Coats suffered too. Many of those received in 1818, while they appeared to look very good when viewed from the front, had skirts 'rather Shorter than usual . . . many of them is an Inch and some 2 Inches too short in The Rear . . .'

### FITTING THE REGIMENT

Ideally a battalion would hope to find in its ranks at least one tailor for each of its companies. The company tailor was to help his comrades keep their clothing in repair, but upon the arrival of the annual clothing all tailors were assembled at regimental

headquarters and put to work fitting the clothing for the entire regiment. Each soldier had to be measured, his clothing altered, the seams reinforced and the lace resewn where necessary. The coats were generally done first, and each company was worked on in succession.

To ensure that this task was done as quickly as possible, the tailors were subjected to a strict regime which entailed long hours, with very little time away from their work. Quite typically, the tailors of the 76th Regiment were to be at work at six o'clock in the morning in summer, or at daylight in winter, and were to cease their labours only at sunset, though in winter they might well work by candlelight until eight o'clock. While the annual clothing was 'in hands', the tailors were excused all duty and forbidden to do any work for officers or NCOs. The strictness of their regime owed not a little to the low regard in which many officers seem to have held them. A fondness for liquor was always suspected, and only through careful monitoring did there

seem any chance of putting 'a cheque upon the tailors, not to run through the work in a careless, idle manner'<sup>(5)</sup>.

Regimental orders seemed always to assume a certain reluctance in the tailors, despite the remuneration paid for their work. As an occupational group, early 19th century tailors had an unenviable reputation for ill-health, the result of cramped workshops and long hours of sedentary work, bent over their task while sitting cross-legged. It may easily be imagined that those who had enlisted to escape such conditions were not necessarily pleased to find themselves compelled to work again as tailors for their regiment. No doubt too, many had come from the worst end of the tailoring trade – unapprenticed men, or 'Dungs', who had found their work as uncongenial as it was unrewarding. A regiment's tailors might well be very poor representatives of their craft, and 'if a Tailor is not equal to be Master Tailor', the chore of immediate supervision could simply fall on a sergeant appointed to it<sup>(6)</sup>.





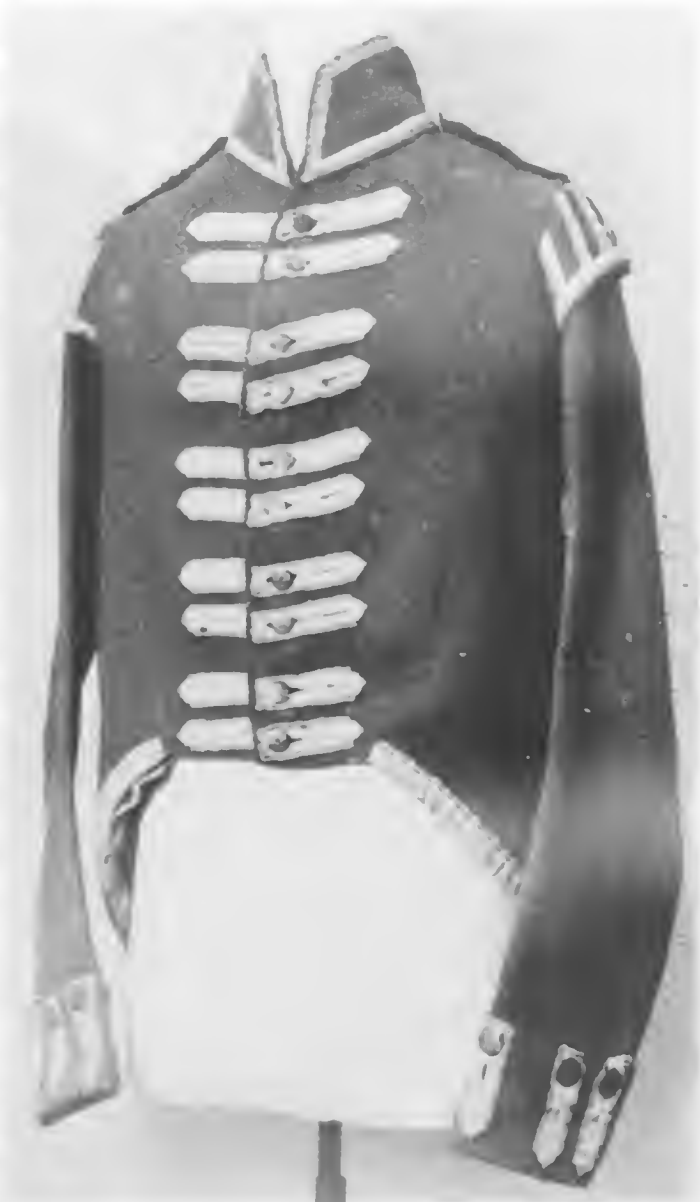


## THE SURVIVORS

A great many hands shared in determining the final appearance of the soldier's coat. The demands of regimental 'economy', and the rigours of hard service both during and after its useful military life, have destroyed all but a handful. Those that survive seem to have done so by escaping actual wear – though the

provenance of almost all of the current survivors has yet to be thoroughly investigated. The best known are those in France and Belgium, with other examples in Northern Ireland, and as far afield as the United States and Russia.

For clarity of cross-reference, we have numbered the known surviving examples



### Left:

Battalion Company, 83rd Regiment; coat (5); Musée de l'Empéri. The 1/83rd embarked in 1805 for Cape Town and remained there until 1817, when it departed for Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The 2nd Battalion, raised in 1804, provided reinforcements for and itself saw service in the Peninsula from 1809 to 1814, after which it returned to Ireland. Before its disbandment, in 1817, a large detachment was sent to the 1st Battalion at the Cape.

The coat was once in the collection of the painter Edouard Detaille, and is one of two survivors from the 83rd. Both coats would seem to be associated with the 2nd Battalion, being lined for wear in northern climes. The flank company 'wings' on this example are a much later addition, whose cut and ornamentation are quite out of keeping with the rest of the coat. Nevertheless, with a shako and ac-

coutrements, it provides a striking impression of the men who formed the 'red wall' so vividly recalled by Marshal Bugeaud. (Photograph Musée de l'Empéri, courtesy Martin Windrow)

### Above:

Grenadier Company, 87th (The Prince of Wales's Own Irish) Regiment; coat (7); RIF Museum, Armagh. The 1/87th embarked for South America in 1806, and the following year proceeded from there to Cape Town. In 1810 it sailed for Mauritius, and was later sent to India. The 2nd Battalion, raised in 1804, left for the Peninsula in 1808 and remained with the Peninsular army until returning home from southern France in 1814. The 2/87th was disbanded in 1817.

An exact date for the coat cannot be ascribed, but its being fully lined, except for the sleeves, suggests that it was intended for the 2nd Battalion. Lace, one red stripe. Facings, green.

Prior to its purchase in Paris by the RIF Museum in 1962, it was in the collection of Raymond Desvarreux. (Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum)

of Line (as opposed to Militia) other ranks' coats in **bold** type – this sequence is purely arbitrary, and intrinsic to this

continued on page 26







#### Left:

Battalion Company, 26th (Cameroonians) Regiment; coat (4); Musée de l'Empéri. Being on the Irish Establishment, the regiment had its clothing provided by Irish clothiers. The flat pewter buttons, bearing '26' encircled by a wreath, are marked on the back with the name of Renshaw and Woodhouse, Dublin.

Subcontracting the work on coats produced many discrepancies. The pocket flaps on this coat lack the additional buttons, seen on coat (2), with which to close the pocket. Possibly the two 26th coats are slightly different in date, or perhaps more probably the omission of the additional pocket flap buttons on this example was an oversight. The 'loops' of regimental lace

(made of white worsted wool, and for this regiment interwoven with one blue stripe between two yellow) were to be 4in. in length at the top of the chest, and gradually reduced in length to only 3in. at the waist. On this coat the tapering of the loops is very noticeable, but it is less pronounced on the other existing coat, (2). By regulation, confirmed in 1802, collars were to be '3 inches in Breadth', but this example stands 3½in. high. Note that the drawn thread tufting at the ends of the shoulder straps is red and white, as is also the case on coat (2).

The coat was formerly in the collection of Edouard Detaille. (Photograph Musée de l'Empéri; courtesy Martin Windrow)

#### Left and below:

Battalion Company, 83rd Regiment; coat (6); Musée de l'Armée, Les Invalides, Paris. The regimental lace has one red stripe (outer edge) and one green. The buttons are adorned with '83' only. The chest loops were to be 'set on horizontally', but in this case the uppermost ones have been given a distinct slope, which becomes more gradual towards the waist. In contrast to the coats of the 26th Regiment, those of the 83rd are cut square at the waist, the skirts starting about 3in. back from the centre front.

Buttonholes were never cut on this coat, no doubt an oversight by the clothier's subcontractors, and evidence that this particular coat was never altered and fitted for ac-

tual wear. Possibly the missing buttonholes were the reason it was put aside and in the end never made use of. A loop of lace has been removed from each cuff. At present the coat has hooks and eyes to hold it closed. The other survivor from the 83rd – coat (5) – is properly buttonholed. Note the absence of shoulder strap tufting.

The dull madder red colour was in contrast to the brighter scarlet used in sergeants' coats. New, 'fresh coloured' coats soon faded, especially if exposed to intense tropical sunlight.

This coat seems at one time to have been in the collection of General Vanson. (Photograph Musée de l'Armée, courtesy Martin Windrow)





Light Company, 104th Regiment; coat (8); Cape Ann Historical Association, Gloucester, Massachusetts. The 104th was originally raised as the New Brunswick Regiment of Fencible Infantry for service in British North America, but in 1810 became a regiment of the Line. Its service was passed in what is now Canada, where it assisted in the defence of the then British colonies during the War of 1812. The regiment was disbanded in 1817.

The provenance of the surviving coat can be established with some certainty. It is one of 1,100 (destined for the 104th at Quebec) captured by an American privateer, from Salem, during the Anglo-American war. The capture is recorded in contemporary correspondence, from which it is known that the coats were subsequently sold to the United States Army and used for musicians. This one, however, remained with the Webber family of Gloucester, Massachusetts and was given by a descendant to the Cape Ann Historical Association in 1946.

It provides an interesting example of an unused coat, as supplied by a London clothier. From the position of the one extant button on its right cuff (and another on the rear of the left cuff) it seems probable that it was never fully provided with cuff buttons when it left the clothier. Lace, one black stripe (outer edge) and one red stripe. Facings, pale buff (off-white). (Cape Ann Historical Association, special thanks to Marion A. Harding)

series of articles. They are grouped under current location:

Belgium: Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire, Bruxelles

(1) Battalion company, 9th Regiment of Foot (East Norfolk)

(2) Battalion Company, 26th Regiment of Foot (Cameronian)

(3) Light Company, unidentified, possibly Militia

France: Musée de l'Empéri, Salon de Provence

(4) Battalion Company, 26th Regiment of Foot (Cameronian)

(5) Battalion Company, 83rd Regiment of Foot

France: Musée de l'Armée, Les Invalides, Paris

(6) Battalion Company, 83rd Regiment of Foot

Northern Ireland: Royal Irish Fusiliers Regimental Museum, Armagh

(7) Grenadier Company, 87th Regiment of Foot (Prince of Wales's Own



Irish)  
United States: Cape Ann Historical Association, Gloucester, Mass.

(8) Light Company, 104th Regiment of Foot

In Russia there are two jackets, from the 42nd and 43rd Regiments, possibly acquired by Alexander I at about the time of Waterloo or the subsequent occupation of Paris<sup>(7)</sup>. In addition, the Bomann Museum at Celle in West Germany has a fine collection of coats from the King's German Legion

which, importantly, includes three sergeants' coats – further examples of 'British' military clothing supplied by London clothiers. **MI**

**To be continued:** The second part of this series will consider the evolution of the soldier's coat, the materials used, its construction and fit.

#### Notes and sources:

(1) For the cavalry there is a jacket in the National Army Museum ascribed to Lance Corporal Gill, 1st Life Guards.

(2) All references to documents of the Coldstream regiment are by kind

permission of the Lt. Col. Commanding Coldstream Guards. Further details in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* (Summer, 1889).

(3) Public Record Office, WO 30/13B: Royal Warrant, 8 July 1791, clothing.

(4) British Library, Add Mss 57547, 27 November 1802.

(5) Bennett Cuthbertson, *A System for the Compleat Interior Management and Oeconomy of a Battalion of Infantry*, Dublin 1768, p.87.

(6) Standing Orders, 106th Regiment, 1795, p.23.

(7) Notes from John Mollo. Further information on these and any other coats would be welcomed.

**Acknowledgements** for assistance during the preparation of these articles will be listed in the final part.

# The Maori Warrior of the 1840s

IAN KNIGHT & TIM RYAN

"The British soldier found the Maori on the whole the grandest native enemy that he ever encountered. Gurkhas and Sikhs were formidable before them; Zulus were formidable after them, but all these had copied European discipline. The Maori had his own code of war, the essence of which was a fair fight on a day and place fixed by appointment, which the best and bravest man should win. The British soldier, therefore, held him in deepest respect, not resenting his own little defeats, but recognising the noble side of the Maori, and forgetting his savagery."

Sir John Fortescue

Fortescue's comments on the martial qualities of Queen Victoria's enemies may be Eurocentric and simplistic; but in the case of the Maori there is an element of truth. In a series of prolonged campaigns, spread over 30 years – and which are only now receiving the proper attention of historians – the Maoris fought with great skill and daring, despite being heavily outnumbered, and inflicted on British troops more than the odd "little defeat".

The Polynesian ancestors of the Maori race are thought to have arrived in New Zealand from the Tahitian Islands sometime around 800 AD. By the time the first *pakeha*, or Europeans, arrived in the 17th century, the Maori were scattered across New Zealand in tribal groups which laid claim to all of the North Island, and most of the South. They were a people well used to warfare, deeply committed to a complex concept of prestige called *mana* – the slightest infringement of which might lead to *utu*, a payment in kind, a revenge which embroiled families and tribes in a confusing web of vendettas.

The initial contact between the European and the Maori was not auspicious: the explorer Abel Tasman mistook a Maori challenge for a greeting, and was promptly attacked, loosing three of his seamen. Relations were less

fraught as the first European settlements, ramshackle ports servicing the whaling trade, grew up on the Islands; but the great European migrations of the 19th century brought the influx of settlers directly into competition with the Maori over the question of land ownership. Disputed purchases and boundaries were a constant source of friction; the first outbreak of violence occurred in March 1845, and led directly to the First Maori War.

The fighting soon took on a pattern which was to remain characteristic of the whole series of conflicts. Individual Maori tribes would build a *pa*, a complex earthwork entrenchment, complete with concealed rifle pits and 'bomb-proof' chambers, masked by wooden pallasades; and the British would attack it in the traditional manner – a prolonged artillery bombardment followed by an assault. The Maoris usually defended a *pa* long enough to inflict maximum casualties, then withdrew to build another. For the British commander, Maori warfare usually meant a long and frustrating struggle to overcome one *pa* after another.

The First Maori War ended in 1846, but tension over land rights continued to mount, and a much more serious outbreak occurred in 1860, which was to lead to 12 years



of sporadic fighting. The Maori population at the time of the war has been estimated at 60,000 men, women and children, and on no occasion did they field a force of more than 2,000 warriors. At the height of the struggle they were opposed by 18,000 regulars and militia: against such odds Maori resistance was truly remarkable. Gradually, however, the major tribes were subdued and the wars petered out into a prolonged and bitter guerrilla phase, waged in the dense bush and mountain ranges far from the main centres of European settlement.

## MAORI COSTUME

In this article we are primarily concerned with the appearance and weapons of a Maori warrior, or *toa*, of about 1846 – a time when traditional dress and weapons were showing European influence, but had not been displaced by them. We are drawing upon the extremely life-like full

size fibreglass sculptures of New Zealand artist Ray Dawson. Formerly a portrait painter, Dawson made his first life-size sculpture in 1978, and has gone on to produce over 100 figures, now on display at New Zealand's National Army and Royal New Zealand Air Force Museums, and a further 30 for the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. His figures are now considered to be a bench-mark in realism and historical accuracy; from a glance at the accompanying photographs it is not hard to see why.

Although the Maoris did possess a number of projectile weapons, victory in hand-to-hand fighting carried greater prestige in tribal fights, and for that reason the Maori preferred to fight largely unencumbered by restrictive clothing. Warriors and chiefs did possess cloaks of flax, often decorated with attractive coloured woven borders, streamers of black cord, and





Typical appearance of a Maori warrior chief, ariki, of the mid-1840s, crafted by New Zealand sculptor Ray Dawson. Clothing is limited to the apron of twisted cords, maro. The hair is pulled into a top-knot and the face clean-shaven, the better to display the ritual tattooing, moko; note also the typical vertical tattoo patterns on the thigh, puhoro. Rank is indicated by the feathers thrust into the hair; feathers, a shark's tooth, and ribbons hang from the pierced earlobes, and a whalebone tiki or stylised ancestor symbol at the neck. The chief is armed with a 'Brown Bess' trade gun, and carries cartridges in wood-block cartouche 'boxes' with leather flaps. His equipment is completed by a trade tomahawk head mounted on a

whalebone haft, a powder horn, a flaxen haversack, and, hanging on a thong from his left wrist, a hardwood former used in the manufacture of paper cartridges.

#### Below

Each moko was unique to the individual warrior, but this is a typical pattern – series of curvilinear scars which emphasise the shape of the main facial surfaces. At one time there was a lively, if grisly trade in dried warrior heads, brought to the coast by tribesmen and sold to European travellers and sailors. (The sale at auction in London of examples of these souvenir heads was recently prevented after protests by Maori representatives; but numbers remain in Western collections.)





collars of dog-skin or kiwi feathers; but these were not suited to vigorous fighting in the bush – although there are reports of them being wrapped around the left arm to ward off blows, or soaked in water to deflect spear thrusts. Generally, however, the warriors fought either naked, or with a minimal loin covering. Our warrior is wearing a *maro*, an apron of twisted cords. Hand weapons were usually carried thrust into the waist belt. Later, in the 1860s, the most popular garment became the *rapaki*, or waist shawl. This was wrapped round the waist like a kilt, and extended to the knees; it could be made either of native flax, or from a European blanket. It was so practical and comfortable in fern and bush country that it was adopted by many of the opposing Colonial volunteer units. Many Maori also took to wearing European shirts, and waistcoats were particularly popular, as they had pockets which could be used to store cartridges.

#### Tattoos and adornments

The main characteristic of the Maori fighting man was the *moko*, or extensive facial tattoo. Most tattooing, apart from that of Africa, involves pricking the skin and introducing coloured pigment: Maori tattooing is unique among Polynesian peoples in that it involves cutting lines into the skin with a small adze, which is tapped with a wooden mallet. When pigment is introduced into the wound, the result is a permanent raised scar. Each *moko* is unique, although the general pattern serves to emphasise the shape of the face with lines and swirling circles.

*Moko* was not an indication of rank; but it was a very painful process, not undertaken until adulthood, and suggested something of a man's *mana*. The Maori regarded his head as the most sacred (*tapu*) part of his body, where the psychic and spiritual aspects of his *mana* resided. This probably accounts for the Maori practice of taking heads in war; for a warrior to lose his head





A tableau representing the tattooing of a young warrior – an extremely painful process carried out with a small adze, tapped repeatedly with a weighted rod to cut continuous lines into the skin; pigment was later introduced to colour the large, raised scars blue.

was the ultimate loss of *mana*. Severed heads were smoke-dried, and kept as a permanent symbol of the enemy's humiliation. When the Hauhau movement, a mixture of Christianity and traditional Maori beliefs which was violently opposed to the *pakeha* way of life, took hold in the mid-1860s, the severed head of a British officer, Capt. Lloyd of the 65th Regiment, was sent from tribe to tribe to incite them to war. Early European sailors sometimes bought the dried heads of Maori warriors with interesting *moko* patterns as grisly souvenirs.

As the prolonged fighting of the 1860s gradually eroded Maori tradition, many younger warriors ceased to have their faces tattooed. It had been the practice to wear the hair long and swept back into a bun or top-knot, and to shave the face, in order to show off the *moko*, but untattooed warriors took to wearing beards. Some warriors also had tattooing on their thighs (*puhoro*) and buttocks (*rape*).

The standard Maori tactical unit was the tribe (*iwi*) or sub-tribe (*hapu*), which was led by a chief, *ariki*. The chief was usually the eldest-born son of the leading family, but if his *mana* was low, or if he was not considered to be a good war leader, a junior son might take command. In the later stages of the wars this hierarchy was eroded, and commoners of talent became notable leaders, particularly in the guerrilla phase. Our colour photographs illustrate the typical adornment of a chief: the feathers in his top-knot are a sign of his rank. His ear is pierced, and from it hangs a popular black trade ribbon, feathers, a shark's tooth, and pendants of whalebone and jade. Around his neck is a *tiki* charm, also made from whalebone – the



highly stylised representation of a particular ancestor whose good-will and protection are evoked.

#### Weapons

Unlike many native peoples across the world who came up against the expansionism of the European empires, the Maoris were not slow to grasp the significance of firearms. In the 1820s a chief named Hongi Hika visited London, where he was fêted as a celebrity, and returned home laden with gifts. He promptly sold these when he stopped off at Sydney, and used the proceeds to buy firearms. He then instigated a period of tribal expansion; and it has been suggested that several thousand Maoris died from gun-shot wounds before the first wars with the *pakeha*. Unscrupulous sailors off-loaded poor quality guns on Maori customers and sailed away before they could complain. Each shift in the balance of power in Europe produced new wars and subsequent periods of peace,

when unnecessary or obsolete guns were dumped onto unsophisticated markets across the world.

The Maoris had no problem in grasping the nature of such weapons or the skill needed to master them, but the guns themselves were often found wanting, and ammunition and spare parts were very difficult to come by. Bullets had to be improvised, from old nails bound together, from hardwood plugs coated in lead, or from moulds home-made from such unlikely material as clay pipe bowls. It was comparatively easy to find gunpowder or the means to make it, but percussion caps were always in short supply. These could be made by fitting match-heads into boot eyelets, but the results were not very reliable. A Maori could expect a 15% chance of a misfire in ideal conditions, rising to 25% in the rain. If his gun did go off, the poor quality of the projectile cannot have given a high degree of accuracy.

More sophisticated weapons were, of course, captured from the British, and the Maoris developed a preference for the *tupara*, or double-barrelled percussion shotgun. In many ways this was an ideal weapon for close-range bush fighting; it gave two shots to the soldiers' one, and the disadvantage of short range was offset by limited visibility in bush terrain. Despite the fact that they were nearly always out-gunned and out-ranged in fire-fights, the Maoris remained a formidable foe.

Cartouche boxes and haversacks were also improvised. Those shown in our photographs are made from a block of hard-wearing *totara* wood, into which holes have been drilled to take 18 cartridges. A leather flap was then added to each block, to turn them into serviceable cartouche boxes. The haversack, worn in the photographs on the left hip, was inspired by British soldiers' haversacks, and is made of

flax. It was used to store spare flints, musket balls, and paper for making cartridges. Powder-horns were also made by the tribes; cattle were first introduced amongst them by the missionaries.

Not all warriors were able to obtain firearms, of course, even in the later stages of the wars, and many went into action armed only with a variety of striking weapons for close combat. Amongst the traditional weapons were a number of two-handed striking arms, such as the *taiaha*, a hardwood club flattened at one end and with a point, carved to represent a highly stylised human head, and often decorated with feathers at the other. The flat end was used for chopping, and the pointed end for jabbing. The *tewhatewha* was also of wood, and was shaped rather like an axe, with a large flat 'blade' at the top, although the lethal part was the back rather than the front of the blade. Hand weapons included a number of stone, jade, whalebone and wooden clubs, generally called *pau*, which were ground flat and honed along the edges.

European traders also brought other weapons apart from guns. They brought old triangular socket bayonets, which were fitted to poles to make thrusting spears. They also brought tomahawk blades, to which the Maoris added their own handles. These were either long for two-handed use, and called *kakauroa*, or short, and called *patiti*. Both were made out of either whalebone or wood, and carved with traditional designs. Hand weapons were usually carried thrust into the belt, either at the hip or in the small of the back. The tomahawk became the main Maori close-combat weapon in the wars against the *pakeha*.

Having defeated the native peoples of many parts of the world, the British soldier found it easy to romanticise them, as Fortescue's comment reveals. It should not be forgotten that whilst the Maori was capable of great acts of chivalry, he was also



capable of decidedly unromantic acts, such as reviving the old tribal ritual of cannibalism as a terror weapon in the last bitter stages of the war. Nevertheless, at Orakau, where the Maoris conducted a particularly gallant defence of a *pa*, the 65th Regiment erected a monument 'as a memorial to the New Zealanders who fell in the actions of Rangiaowhia . . . and Orakau . . . I say unto you, love your enemies' – surely remarkable and eloquent testimony to the respect in which the Maori was held by his enemies, and unique in the history of the Colonial wars. **MI**

*Detail of the butt of the musket, a 'Brown Bess' flintlock of the type sold in Sydney for the New Zealand trade, and called by the Maoris ngutu-pareira or 'duck's beak' from the shape of the cock. Typical Maori decorative designs are carved into the butt of this example.*

#### **Left:**

*Pouches made of woven flax are worn together with European-made or imitation-European items. The haversack, copied from those worn by the redcoats, carried musket ammunition and spares. The round tattoo designs on the buttocks are a characteristic.*

#### **Below:**

*Patiti or short-handled tomahawk, with a trade head fitted to a whalebone hafi carved with designs representing ancestral figures.*





# Der Waffenmeister

## Making It Look Good On Screen

GRAHAM SCOTT

A lot has happened to Jim Dowdall in the last 39 years: he has been blown up, beaten up, set on fire from hair to toes; had bottles, rifle butts and clubs rained down on his head; he has crashed motorbikes, cars and tanks; he has fired everything from a pistol to a howitzer; he has been cuddled by an elephant, and he once beat up Prince Charles. He doesn't look bad on it: six foot tall, lean and tanned and, when we met, dressed for the part in faded denims, a pack of Marlboro in the top pocket, and gadgets like a knife, torch and answerphone bleeper hanging from his leather belt.

But he is not a cliché – not a Rambo thug covered in scars who is too thick to do anything except fall off high buildings. The working life of a stuntman has changed radically since he started falling down stairs for a living and is now, as he put it, 'a high technology game, a

sophisticated business giving a better visual effect with greater safety'. The benefits are significant if you are good, and lucky: he lives in a lovely, secluded house near Hastings, surrounded by farmland and hanging woods; he has a Mercedes, a Range Rover, and more mili-

tary vehicles than you see in the average war film, which he can work on in his superbly equipped workshop, which is next to his personal gymnasium/archery room, which is next to the store-room where his collection of motorbikes fills all the available space, which is just across the courtyard from the mews for his hawk. But how much would you demand to be paid to be set on fire, or blown off a bridge over a 100-foot drop – or both?

Jim could quote you a price and, if it was acceptable, he would then prepare for the job, turn up, do it as many times as required, and then go home, invoice to follow. To get to this level of professionalism in a dangerous, shifting market you have to be good, experienced and lucky. Jim is clearly all three; but he has the extra ingredient of being an expert on military matters, from 1890 weapons drill to stripping a Heckler & Koch. This makes him an added asset to any war film, where

he is often asked to teach extras military drill or to advise on uniforms and equipment. The list of war films in which he has taken part spans the last 20 years of movies – *Where Eagles Dare* (1968), *The Eagle Has Landed* (1976), *A Bridge Too Far* (1976), *Hanover Street* (1978) – not forgetting all the others, like *Superman*, the Indiana Jones films, and numerous Bond extravaganzas.

You always need a stroke of luck to break into the big-time, and Jim's came in 1966 when he was taken on as an apprentice at Baptys, who still provide about 90% of all the weapons and vehicles you see in war films. A good schooling (including time spent studying with Prince Charles, whom he dropped on the football field after he decided that HRH had tackled unfairly) had been followed by numerous jobs: selling motorbikes, working in the circus (where he struck up a rapport with all the animals, particularly the elephants), and other fill-ins like cleaning cars. Baptys was Mecca to the 18-year-old, and it was a big leap. He spent the first three months just stripping and reassembling guns, which seemed like heaven to him, before he was allowed out on set as an assistant armourer.

### TEACHING MARVIN TO SUCK EGGS

He soon progressed naturally to armourer, or *Waffenmeister*, the German term he finds more accurate. The *Waffenmeister* is responsible for the weapons and for the people using them. He has to keep the weapons, from pistols to howitzers, working properly; he keeps them in ammunition; and he looks after the users, delivering the weapon to them at the beginning of the day and taking it back at the end.

The first film he worked on was *The Dirty Dozen*, and he still remembers going up to

*Jim Dowdall, with a couple of the fruits of his business which are also working tools of the trade: his BMW R75 motorcycle combination, and his DUKW.*





Lee Marvin to show him how to handle his M3 – Jim still an impressionable 18-year-old who was completely awe-struck to find himself working with Donald Sutherland, Charles Bronson and all his other heroes. He went through all the spiel about how the gun worked, but stuttered to a halt when the great star just stood there giving him a pale, silent stare. 'Marvin took the gun out of my hands, field-stripped it on the table, put it back together again, and gave it back to me. He never said a word. He was the best.' In his innocence, Jim had not realised that he was trying to explain a Second World War US sub-machine gun to a man who had fought in the Pacific with the 4th US Marine Division – Lee Marvin was a wounded and decorated veteran of a number of assaults, notably Yellow Beach 2 on Saipan, 18 June 1944.

Baptys supply just about any weapon you can think of, from bayonet to tank; and all of them are real, not imitation. For film work they are converted to blank-firing, usually by the expedient of fitting a convertor into the barrel. Not only does this stop them accepting ball ammunition, it also raises back-pressure after a blank has been fired – blanks don't have the pressure necessary to

force back the cocking mechanism of a blow-back weapon if fired through an unrestricted barrel.

Blanks come in various types, depending on the calibre of the weapon. Rifles simply take military blanks, brass cartridges with wadded and crimped ends, while pistols and machine guns use wooden 'bulleted blanks'. As the name suggests, these are brass cartridges with wooden 'bullets' which, when fired, shatter against the restrictor. In some of the close action sequences on *Where Eagles Dare* several of the stars found themselves peppered with wooden splinters. Another favoured option is to convert everything to 9mm, so that they run on German sealed and crimped rounds, which are both effective and reliable. All three types obviously give the desired result of lots of bang and a spent case flying out as the next round goes in.

Being on the receiving end isn't quite so much fun. Jim has been shot hundreds of times, and has scars to prove it. The normal method is to strap a steel plate to the area to be hit; on top of this is taped a small detonator, and on top of this is taped a receptacle full of blood. What kind of receptacle? 'Well, we normally use condoms.' Wires are then led off to a trigger,



held either by the victim or by a special-effects man. The material just over the detonator is rubbed away until it is weak, and when the whole thing is triggered the bloody explosion should blow out just where the material has been scored. Even when being hit by a burst of machine gun fire, with a chest full of detonators, this is a fairly safe system – although it did go wrong once. It was pouring with rain and the tape slipped, sliding the detonator behind the plate, next to Jim's ribs. When it was triggered he got a hole in his side the size of a 50p piece. It would have been interesting to see the medical report: 'Cause of chest wound – exploding condom.'

After three years at Baptys, which Jim spent behind the camera learning his craft, he left and joined the Paras – out of which he was invalided with two impacted vertebrae

A still from *Hanover Street*: Dowdall is the small figure clinging to the end of the broken bridge as it sways over a 100ft. drop. The bridge was cut by blowing out explosive bolts – uncomfortably close to where Jim was standing, and with the velocity of shrapnel – and Jim had to fall with the collapsed centre-section, catching the bottom rungs as he passed them.

#### Above:

Made up to double for Christopher Plummer on the set of *Hanover Street*, 1978. 'Your little bit of kudos is doing something that people recognise the star couldn't have done.'

(the classic parachutist's injury) less than two years later. He worked his way back into TV work, this time in front of the camera, doing the stunts. He grafted his way up until he found himself a stuntman on one of the biggies: *A Bridge Too Far*. The battle was as difficult to organise the second time around as it had been in 1944, but at last the film got under way;





*In The Dirty Dozen: The Next Mission Dowdall had to roll a motorcycle combination at speed after being 'hit'. To do this you fill the nose of the sidecar with concrete, and fix a spike through the bottom of it. When the bike is up to speed the rider flicks the handlebars away from the sidecar. The weight shifting shoves the nose of the sidecar into the road, the spike bites, and the whole combination goes flying. Two and a half somersaults is normal.*

#### **Right:**

*Fire jobs are the most dangerous. Precautions involve two fireproof suits under the costume, a good slathering of a special flame- and heat-retardant gel, and foil under the predicted 'hot spots' which are normally, as here, the back, arms and shoulders. Highly inflammable upholstery glue is applied with a stick. Then they set fire to you.*



and the authorities agreed to shut the busy Waal river to all shipping for two hours one Sunday morning – which is a bit like the Ministry of Transport agreeing to shut the M1.

Everyone was up before dawn to prepare for the filming of the US paratroopers making a river crossing under fire – among them, Jim Dowdall. Crew, actors and stuntmen were very tense, but ready, when a certain actor turned up. With time ticking away, he refused to have his hair cut in an authentic 1940s military style; then he had to have sneakers dyed brown, instead of wearing heavy army boots; then he had to have cardboard in his holster to cut down weight, and a light wooden dummy rifle.

Jim's comments are unprintable, but he continues: 'We had to cross in small assault boats, which we were meant to propel with our rifle butts, but in fact we had a small motor hidden inside. The engineers had rigged up floating strings of charges in the water which would go off as we passed, to simulate the mortar fire. [The actor] was with us, and the engineers got their revenge on him: they set those charges off right beside us – we all got drenched. The cameras were rolling on us, and you could hear him swearing – I spent most of the crossing trying

not to smile.'

Jim speaks more warmly of some other talents involved, such as his friend Bill Aylmore with whom he had worked at Baptys, an ex-instructor with 20 years' service in the infantry. Among other things, Bill was good with the PIAT, so they sent for him when they needed an anti-tank sequence. 'They put Bill up on a balcony with a camera right behind him as the SS come charging over the bridge. This Leopard done up as a Tiger comes roaring over the bridge and they say, "Well Bill, just see if you can get anywhere near

it, but don't worry – we've got a charge mounted on its glacis plate." After three takes he plopped one right on the charge. In the film you can actually see the bomb fly through the air and hit the glacis. I just worshipped that man when I worked with him.'

#### **Anticipating the snags**

Obviously, preparation is the key to a successful stunt, and Jim prepares more than most, since it is often his life on the line, not that of the producer who just wants it to look good. When working on the film *Hanover Street* he had to double for Christopher



Plummer, who had to be standing on a bridge when it collapsed. Jim wasn't looking forward to the stunt since it was a 100ft. drop, he only had one tiny safety wire, and he had to fall as the bridge broke in two and catch the bottom rungs of a ladder. The bridge was to be broken by blowing out exploding bolts, which he wanted screened, but which everyone else said were just dandy as they were. Eventually he got them to set one off, and they all went off for lunch – except for Jim. He spent the time wandering round the chalk quarry in Rickmansworth where they were filming, and eventually he found the bolt head – 160 yards from the bridge. . . . After full and frank discussions with the engineers about where the bolt heads might end up if blown a few feet from his body, they agreed to put cages over each one. Jim lived to fight another day.

'Explosions are an unknown quantity, but it's

up to me to go in there and take the risk.' Whether coordinating other people's stunts or doing his own, the amount of work required of Jim is enormous. A battle scene involving tanks, artillery and infantry is a major undertaking, meaning hundreds of extras, and weeks of rehearsal. The artillery is simple enough; it stays at the rear and bangs off charges shoved down the barrels unless, as in *A Bridge Too Far*, they decide to do it properly. This involves going to the expense of having pistons operated by nitrogen cylinders fitted to the carriage so that, when the shell is fired, the whole barrel slams back in a cloud of dust, instead of just sitting there as if it has coughed.

Making these shells 'land' takes more hard work. First a pit is dug, into which is placed either a pipe containing compressed air, or a 'pot' – a cone shape with explosive at the bottom. On top of this is placed crumbled cork,

which is mixed with a little cement dust, some fullers' earth, and perhaps a little petrol for some flame. Once the battlefield is prepared with these pits and they have all been linked up to a firing position, the whole crew walk the field, marking out where the pits are and getting a feel for the terrain. They go over it again and again; then at a trot; and finally for real, the infantry praying that they will be able to see where the marked areas are when running flat out.

In fact the contents of the pots are very light, so you can get quite close to an explosion without getting hurt. If, as happens to Jim, you are the lucky one who actually gets to be blown up, you set up a pressure plate on the far side of the pot. You run like hell, over the concoction, and stamp on the pressure plate, which helps you hurl yourself into the air as the charge goes off right behind you. The other option is to leave the triggering to a special-effects

*Jim Dowdall in a still from the forthcoming third Indiana Jones film. A gas-driven ram catapults Jim up, high enough to hit the cable between the ships, and he then falls back through the ball of flame into the water. He had to do two takes.*

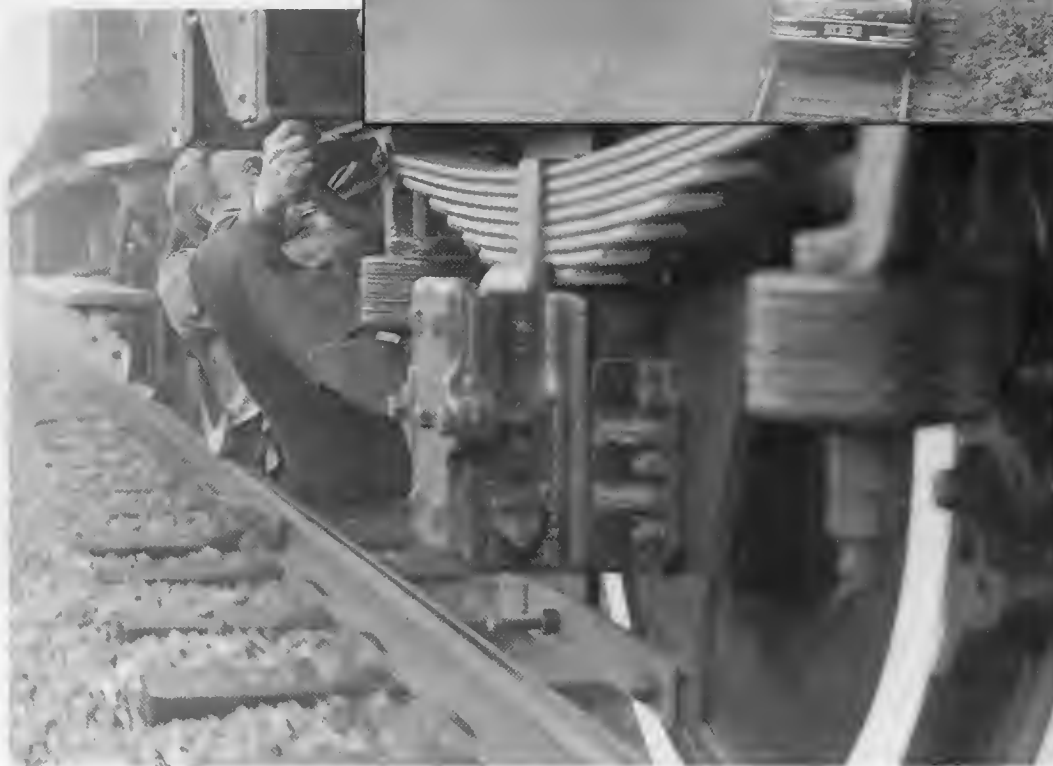
man; but, keen to make it look authentic, he is all too liable to set it off as Jim is still over the pot. The frequent result is Jim flying through the air, covered in something not unlike cat litter, with a pained yet resigned look on his face.

#### **Bespoke cremations**

Fire jobs are the worst. Crawling out of blazing vehicles or running through a burning room with all your clothing on fire requires not only heavy preparation, but also the ability to stay icily cool under conditions that would send many a brave man into hysterical paralysis. He prepares carefully. On top he wears natural materials like wool, but under that are



Essentially, a stunt is a stunt, whether it is for a war film or any other type of thriller. In *Octopussy*, doubling for Roger Moore, Dowdall had to leap the gap between the speeding Mercedes and the train, with just a couple of added hand-holds to help him get a grip. He then had to fight over, under and round the moving train. A false move here is not something to contemplate. In this same sequence another stuntman was chronically injured when he was smashed off the outside of the train by a trackside obstruction. (Danjaq SA)



two layers of fire-proof fabric, one of them a special material invented for the SAS after the Iranian embassy siege. Under selected likely hot spots he places a type of foil to reflect the intense heat; and then he smothers everything else in a special American gel, soaking his hair, getting it into his ears, eyes, and every other nook and cranny. They then apply – mainly over his back, arms and shoulders – an upholstery glue which has a high flash-point. Then they stand back, and set fire to him.

If he is moving he has to point into the wind, a slight breeze being absolutely vital to clear the flames from his face and to let him get some oxygen. Every motion is carefully considered as the flames spread to the rest of his clothing. 'If it starts to go

wrong or gets too hot the temptation is to put your hands up to cover your eyes, but if your sleeves are already burning that can make it worse. It can be very dangerous – I usually get something singed.'

He works out in his gym for 40 minutes a day, but not to pump himself up, more to stretch himself out. He has severed tendons, cracked his jaw and his skull, nearly lost a finger, impacted a third vertebrae, and got a duff thumb. 'I get a lot of headaches and tingling in my fingers. If I don't work out for a week I get the most godawful headaches and stiffness. Some mornings I have to kick-start my fingers, and cold, wet weather is really bad. It's the legacy you have to accept.'

Despite all the films and the injuries, each job is still new

and exciting – and potentially the last. 'The old cliché about how you don't perform your best unless you are nervous is completely true. I still get a dry mouth before each job, and I get so psyched up that I can feel my whole body and about six inches beyond it. You are so hyped up it's a phenomenal feeling. If it's a big job you think about it for days beforehand, and the night before I won't sleep much. But I still think "I am going to come out of this in one piece", I've never thought that I won't come back. If you think that you might get killed then you should give up, because the thought would impair your judgement and that degree of fear would screw you up.'

'Of course, at the end of the day it is just a bit of film, and I hope my ego never gets

the better of my ideas on safety. My part, the stunt, is my little bit of kudos, doing something that nobody else can, but it is still just a few minutes of film.' Jim accepts it as show-business, but some of the mathematics seem almost absurd: for the Flash Gordon film he was in one sequence that took six weeks to rehearse. The fight itself took a whole week to film. On the screen it lasts three and a half minutes.

More recently his 'little bits of kudos' have been lasting only seconds, since he has moved into the world of commercials – you might have spotted him in the Mazda ad where he drove it over a moving Porsche and Mercedes, or in the Fiat Uno ad where he drove it completely round the wall of a tunnel. Commercials suit him, as they are very hard work but pay well and only take a small amount of time. He is now more of a co-ordinator, and consequently finds himself as busy as ever, but he does get the odd day to play with his 19 vehicles and 13 motor-bikes. The vehicles include numerous jeeps, a DUKW, and one of Steve McQueen's Harleys, all of which he loves tinkering with in his workshop.

It sounds like fun, a big boy's life; but he has earned it the hard way, and you can see him ache sometimes as he speaks. What started out as a big chest-beating exercise is now a highly disciplined career, where macho posturing is dangerous and has no part. But when we were talking about taking part in a big battle scene, with explosions, yells from the director, extras hurtling all over the place, he can't help but smile. 'We're all slightly Peter Pan in this business; we're being paid to play Cowboys and Indians. You run around with a Schmeisser and a German uniform and blast away – it really is fun. It's weird, but sometimes in the middle of a war film, in the middle of some huge battle, I expect my mum to appear and say: "Come on, out of it. When will you grow up?"' **MJ**

# REVIEWS

**'Operation Barbarossa: Strategy and Tactics on the Eastern Front, 1941'** by Bryan I. Fugate; Spa Books, Stevenage, Herts.; 415pp., 8pp mono illus., 46 maps; appendices, notes, biblio; £14.95

Bryan Fugate is fluent in both Russian and German, and received a doctorate in Soviet and German military history from the University of Texas. He also spent three months at the National Archives in Washington examining captured German records, and a further eight months at the German Federal Military Archives, as well as drawing extensively on numerous primary and secondary Soviet sources. He is, therefore, eminently qualified to write so detailed a study of one of the major turning points in the history of the 20th century; and is to be congratulated not only on producing an intelligible, readable account of events set in a vast landscape peopled by immense armies, but also for his ability to bring the principal protagonists to life and interpret their decisions.

His chapters include pre-war Soviet defence planning and strategy, German plans for the invasion of the USSR, the advance to the Dniepr and the battles along its upper reaches, the fatal pause of Army Group Centre, the arguments between Hitler and his senior commanders, Stalin's attitude to the defence of Kiev and the resumed advance on Moscow, and a re-appraisal of the strategy and tactics of the campaign. There are also several useful appendices dealing with the organisational structure of Soviet units in June 1941, Soviet units opposing Army Group Centre in June and September, and the organisation and structure of the German Army during the relevant period, including orders of battle and equipment tables. The detailed maps are excellent.

Yet, despite the depth of his research, Dr. Fugate reaches conclusions which his publishers admit are controversial. Following his account of the reduction of the Kiev pocket he comments that "The Wehrmacht could perhaps have won a strategic victory in 1941 had the upper-level leadership been decisive and resolute in consolidating the German gains in the southern part of the Soviet Union, but this was not to be. In early September the German high command undertook the planning of an operation that was guaranteed to save Russia — an assault on a fortified Moscow in the fall of 1941." The object of Barbarossa, of course, was not confined to winning strategic victories, but involved the destruction of the Soviet state, and for that the capture of Moscow held absolute priority. It was Hitler's failure to maintain that objective by insisting on the reduction of the Kiev pocket that cost priceless time, so that when Army Group Centre resumed its advance it stood little chance of

reaching the strengthened Moscow defences before the onset of a horrendous winter.

Although he argues strenuously to the contrary, the author himself may well subconsciously accept this, since the bulk of his text is devoted to Army Group Centre's operations prior to the Kiev diversion, sometimes at the expense of events such as the battle of Brody-Dubno, until Kursk the largest tank battle ever fought. Again, perhaps too much emphasis is placed on squabbles between and lobbying by senior German officers, since friction of this kind is present in every army. Nevertheless, the book has much to commend it and is worth reading, possibly alongside such works as John Erickson's *The Road to Stalingrad*. Students of the Eastern Front will find the price a fair one. **BP**

**'The Indian Army and the King's Enemies, 1900-1947'** by Charles Chevenix-Trench; Thames & Hudson, 1988; 321 pp., 50 illustrations, 20 maps and plans; £16.95

It is a remarkable and perhaps not widely-known fact that the British-Indian Army which fought the Germans, Italians and Japanese in the Second World War, and which at its greatest strength totalled 1,800,000 men, was, in its Indian ranks, entirely a volunteer force; not a Hindu, Sikh or Moslem from the great sub-continent, which two years after VJ-Day was to split, with much communal bloodshed, into the independent states of India and Pakistan, was a conscript. In 1939 less than a thousand Indians held the King's Commission, all other officers being British; by 1945 this number had increased to over 15,000. For a people allegedly anxious to rid itself of the king's dominion, its army's record against that king's enemies was extraordinary; and the old Indian Army emerged from the Second World War with its reputation and skill-at-arms higher than at any time in its 200-year history.

In this book Charles Chevenix-Trench, once an officer of Hodson's Horse, tells the story, not just of the Indian Army in the Second World War, but of its last 47 years in the service of the King-Emperor; of campaigns on the North-West Frontier; of the Indian Corps' dreadful baptism of fire in its first-ever experience of European warfare when, still clad in khaki drill with obsolete equipment, it was thrown into the line near Ypres in October 1914; its subsequent campaigns in Gallipoli, East Africa, Mesopotamia and Palestine; the inter-war years; the 1939-45 fighting in North Africa, Italy and Burma; and the final tragedies of Partition.

Drawing heavily on personal reminiscences, the author paints a vivid picture of Indian and Gurkha soldiers at war, not flinching from

their occasional failures and weaknesses, but also giving full credit to their soldierly virtues. Mercenaries these men undoubtedly were but, as the author says, they served 'less for pay than for the prestige attached in India to the mercenary profession', and, whatever their religion or class, for the honour of their regiment and their attachment to their British officers, who repaid their trust and loyalty with singular devotion.

The old British-Indian Army was a unique and memorable force, reflecting great credit on all its races, and its doings in this century have found a worthy and most readable chronicler in this book. **MJB**

## Cassette:

**'Mortar Fire'**, memoir by Paul Francia read by John Hosken; published by Clio Press; available from St. Dunstan's, 12-14 Harcourt St., London W1A 4XB; £6.00 incl. P&P

This is an unusual and very worthwhile production, sponsored by St. Dunstan's, the organisation for men and women blinded on service. Paul Francia lost his sight while serving the mortars of D Co., 1st Middlesex Regt. in the NW Europe campaign, 1944-45. He later became a history lecturer; and, in retirement, began assembling this unique record by tracing and interviewing former comrades. The two-cassette set represents a fascinating personal record of a young man's impressions of war in a mortar unit in the front lines during the very costly drive from Normandy to Northern Germany, and includes a vivid epilogue in its descriptions of occupation duty in the immediate aftermath of the fighting. We found it instructive and moving; highly recommended. **MCW**

## We have also received:

**'In Glass Houses'** by Robert Boyles (Military Provost Staff Corps Assoc., Berechurch Hall Camp, Colchester, Essex; £6.50 + £1.00 P&P), a history of the MPSC who staff British military prisons.

**'U-Boat Aces'** by Geoffrey Jones (William Kimber, £13.95), an account of some famous operations by Second World War U-boats, illustrated with interesting photographs — don't be put off by the inexplicably crude jacket artwork.

**'Spitfire Diary'** by E.A.W. Smith, and **'Challenge in the Air'** by M.A. Liskutin (both William Kimber, both £13.95), two illustrated memoirs of Spitfire pilots.

**'Whirlwind Squadron'** by Eric Thomason (Wm. Kimber, £13.95), the illustrated memoirs of an Australian pilot who flew not only the little-known Whirlwind but also Hurricanes and Typhoons, including a number of particularly hazardous operations.

**'Colditz Last Stop'** by Jack Pringle (Wm. Kimber, £13.95), the illustrated memoirs of an inveterate Second World War escaper.

**'The Everlasting Arms'** by John Searby, edited by Martin Middlebrook (Wm. Kimber, £13.95), the memoirs of a bomber and Pathfinder pilot who rose from the ranks to become an air commodore at Bomber Command HQ.

**'Horsa Squadron'** by Will Morrison (Wm. Kimber, £13.95), the illustrated memoirs of a veteran of the Glider Pilot Regiment.

**'Gruesome Tide'** by Eric J. Collette (Wm. Kimber, £9.50); and **'Coastal'** by Barry Coward (Wm. Kimber, £10.50), both novels set during the Second World War.

**'The Reminiscences of Gen. Jean V. Allard'** (University of British Columbia Press, from 1 Gower St., London WC1E 6HA; £26.50), The illustrated autobiography of Canada's first French-Canadian Chief of Staff. This contains interesting material on service with the 'Vandoo's' in Italy and NW Europe; as CO of 25th Bde. in Korea; and as Chief of Staff at the time of the unification of the Canadian Armed Forces.

**'Service Handguns, A Collector's Guide'** by K.-P. König & M. Hugo (Batsford, £14.95), short sections on ammunition, care and conservation, otherwise 200-plus pages each with b/w photos of both sides of a weapon, some with extra detail views, plus tabular specifications. Twenty-one nations, more than 200 weapons, mostly since 1890s.

**'Imperial Rearguard'** by Lawrence James (Brassey's, no price marked), an illustrated analysis of Britain's 'wars of Empire, 1919-85' in India, Africa, the Middle East, Far East, Ireland and the South Atlantic.

**'Narrow Gauge Railways, Wales and the Western Front'** by Humphrey Household (Alan Sutton Publishers, £10.95), a mixture of reminiscence and historical detail, 100-plus b/w photographs — mostly Welsh lines but with additional chapter on WD Light Railways 1914-18.

**'Korea, The Unknown War'** by Jon Halliday & Bruce Cumings (Viking, £12.95), a well-illustrated book published to coincide with the Thames TV documentary series, and generally sharing its disenchanted viewpoint. Very little serious military detail — e.g. the Inchon operation gets less than a page, and there are no separate index entries for US Army or US Marines, let alone for individual formations.

**'Mad Minutes and Vietnam Months'** by Micheal Clodfelter (available Bailey Bros. & Swinfen, Warner House, Folkestone, Kent CT19 6PH; p/bk, £11.95), a memoir of Vietnam service by a sergeant in 2/502nd Airborne between mid-1965 and January 1967.

**'British Army Cloth Insignia, 1940 to the Present'** by Brian Leigh Davis; and **'Special Forces Insignia, British and Commonwealth Units'** by James G. Shortt (both Arms & Armour Press, £7.95), which include basic price guides.

**'Scapegoat! Famous Courts Martial'** by John Harris (Severn House, £5.95 p/bk).



# DIEN BIEN PHU

## (2) Uniforms of the Parachute Battalions

DENIS LASSUS

Paintings by KEVIN LYLES

Although the parachute units which retook Dien Bien Phu in November 1953 were reduced to a minority of the garrison during the second phase of operations, their later reinforcement, and their central part in the desperate defence of the entrenched camp in the climatic weeks of the battle, have earned them immortality in any account of Dien Bien Phu. Another reason for studying them first is that their fighting uniforms were more varied than those of other units.

Just before Operation 'Castor' was launched, a proportion of the parachute battalions had been issued with new French camouflage uniforms. However, as these had been distributed in relatively limited numbers (only one set per man, apparently), it was not unusual to see camouflage uniforms of several diverse origins worn in the ranks of any given unit.

### CAMOUFLAGE UNIFORMS OF FOREIGN ORIGIN

Of the seven paratroop battalions which took part in the battle of Dien Bien Phu proper, three still made general use of camouflage uniforms of US or British origins. (We cannot say definitely that they had received no issue of French camouflage clothing, however.) These were the 6<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de Parachutistes Coloniaux (6<sup>e</sup> BPC), the 8<sup>e</sup> Bataillon Parachutiste de Choc (8<sup>e</sup> BPC) and the 11<sup>e</sup> Régiment

de Chasseurs Parachutistes (11<sup>e</sup> RCP). Moreover, although numerous photos show men of the 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Étranger de Parachutistes (1<sup>er</sup> BEP) wearing French camouflage, some also show personnel still wearing foreign issue. Units are often hard to identify in photos taken during the battle, and it is impossible to make rigid generalisations.

#### US Camouflage Jackets

The US Army's camouflage jacket of 1943, identifiable by its two large rectangular-flapped chest pockets, was still sometimes to be seen; but at Dien Bien Phu it was the US Marine Corps camouflage jackets which predominated. Two different types were in use concurrently.

The first was the so-called 'Raider' type, from the M1944 two-piece suit. It fastened up the front with five black metal buttons marked 'US Marine Corps', and two more closed the bottom of each sleeve. Two large internal chest pockets were reached through vertical openings immediately on each side of the front closure, each being closed by a single snap fastener.

The second type, a good deal better known, was the so-called 'third pattern' USMC paratrooper jump smock. This resembled the 'Raider' jacket in outline, but



differed in details. The front closure was by six snap fasteners, and each cuff had a single snap. The chest pockets were unchanged; but two extra pockets of the same design were tailored in below the waist. Additionally, a large 'poacher's pocket' stretched right across the back, access being via a vertical opening set in the side seams on each side, closed by a zip and covered by a vertical rectangular flap with three snap fasteners.

These USMC jackets were reversible, and both used the same type of camouflage patterns: one side was green-dominant, the ground being light yellowish-green, with a 'duck hunter' pattern in two shades of green and two of brown; the other side was brown-dominant, with a beige ground and a sparser pattern of two shades of brown.

#### British Camouflage Jackets

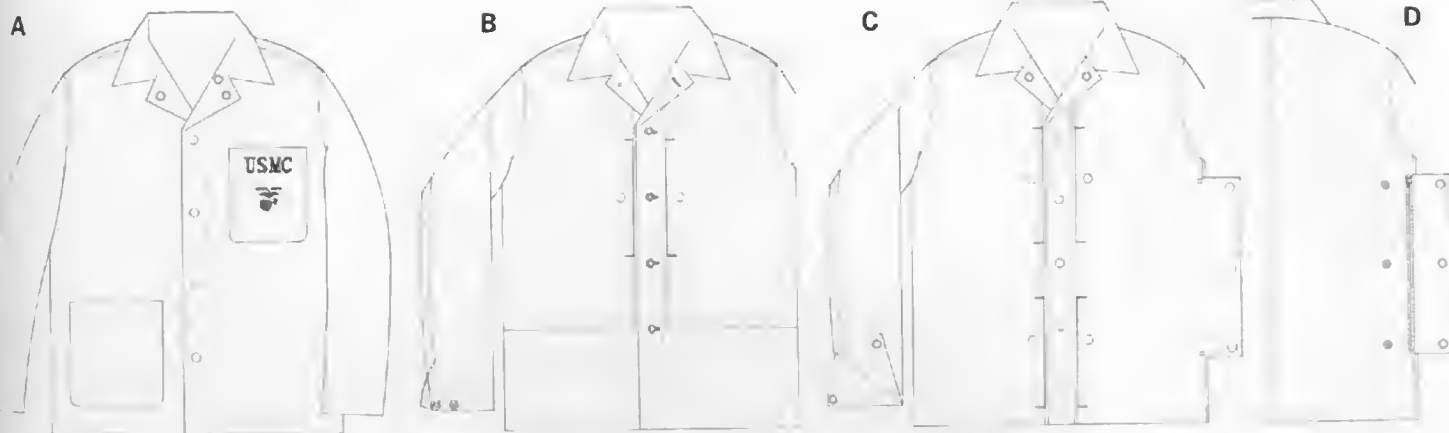
The British Denison smock still equipped a large proportion of the 8<sup>e</sup> BPC. The great majority seem to have been of the original type, with half-length zips, and the buttoning tightening tab above the wrist; knit cuffs do not seem

evident in photographs.

The smock of the 1943 windproof camouflage suit was highly prized by French paratroopers for its comfortable lightness in the tropics (thus its nickname of 'sausage skin'); but its original cut was impractical, and it was widely modified locally. As issued, it was of pullover design, with a rather small neck-vent and a fixed hood. Two box-pleated chest pockets were closed by pointed, buttoned flaps; two larger, unpleated skirt pockets had rectangular flaps. The wrists had buttoning tightening tabs; a broad drawstring tape allowed the lower hem to be tightened round the body, and another tape drew the hood closed around the face.

Most French modifications were made to the closure, and seldom to the pockets. Most simply, the neck-hole was sometimes enlarged with a slit down the chest, which could be closed with a single button. More often a zip was inserted – sometimes to mid-chest, sometimes right down to the hem. The hood was often removed, and a collar substituted. If the hood itself was cut down into a collar,

*Dien Bien Phu, 20 November 1953: in the course of Operation 'Castor', Lt. Col. Fourcade (left), commanding GAP 1, confers with a captain on his brigade staff. He wears an unmodified British windproof smock and, unusually, a pair of dark khaki wool service dress trousers. The captain wears a '47/52 smock in camouflage pattern D1, and '47/51 trousers in pattern B1. (All photographs, ECP Armées)*



this had rounded ends; if the hood were removed altogether and a new collar made, this had conventional pointed ends.

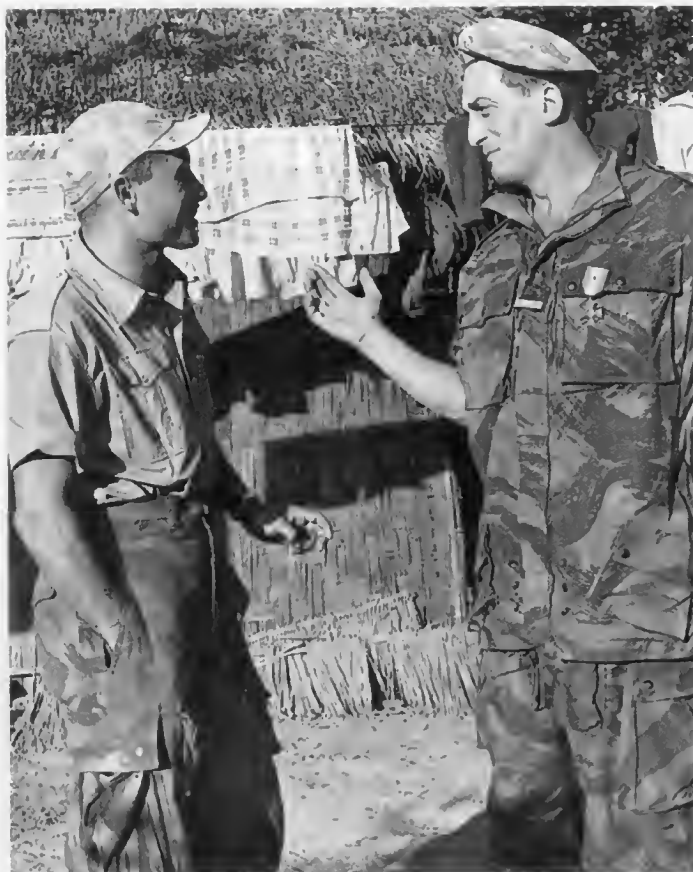
#### Trousers

The trousers most often worn with the US and British jackets were those from the British windproof suit. Originally issued as over-trousers, they had a large internal gusset in place of an opening fly, and a broad tape drawstring in the waist. In French service they were often given an opening fly, and belt loops round the waist; the legs were resewn a little narrower; and the single map pocket on the front of the left thigh was often moved to the outside of the leg – a second pocket was not infrequently added to the right thigh.

The trousers of the US Army 1943 two-piece camouflage suit, identifiable by the large bellows cargo pockets mounted high on the outside of each thigh, were occasionally seen in use; but the trousers of the 1942 and 1944 USMC camouflage uniforms were very rare.

### FRENCH CAMOUFLAGE UNIFORMS<sup>(1)</sup>

The camouflage uniforms distributed to several battalions shortly before the operation were of the 1947/51 and 1947/52 models; occasional examples of the uncamoouflaged, dark khaki model 1947 and 1947/51 were also to be seen.



#### Dark khaki jump uniform model 1947

This should not be confused with the *'tenue de combat kaki foncé mle. 1947'* worn by non-airborne units, and more often called simply *treillis* – this will be described in the next article in this series.

In photographs the 1947 jump smock is distinguishable from the 1947/51 by having two snap fasteners, instead of three, on each chest pocket. The trousers did not have the three small thigh pockets of the '47/51 and '47/52 models. It is impossible to state categorically that the camouflaged version of the model 1947 uniform was never issued in Indochina,

but it is unlikely.

#### Dark khaki or camouflaged jump uniform model 1947/51

This, and the subsequent model, deserve more attention, since they were the uniforms habitually worn by paratroopers from late 1953 to the end of hostilities in Indochina. As with the model 1947 jump uniform, one may encounter uncamoouflaged examples; but this uniform was the first to be produced in a camouflage pattern devised with the Far East, rather than Europe, in mind.

#### Jump smock model 1947/51

Generously cut, with so-called 'pivot' sleeves, the smock had a double front closure: a zip ran from collar to



E

Schematic drawings of US camouflage clothing still in use by French paratroopers in 1954. (A) USMC jacket, 1942, with asymmetric single chest and skirt pockets; this was rare by 1954. (B) USMC so-called 'Raider' jacket, 1944. (C) & (D) Front and back of USMC so-called 'third pattern' paratrooper's smock. (E) The trousers of the 1943 US Army two-piece camouflage uniform. (Christa Hook)

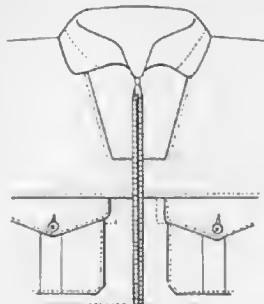
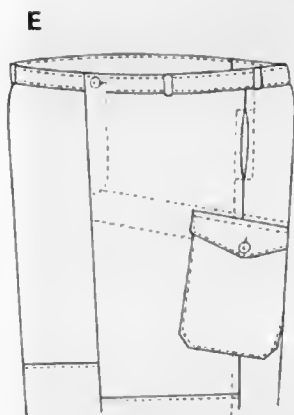
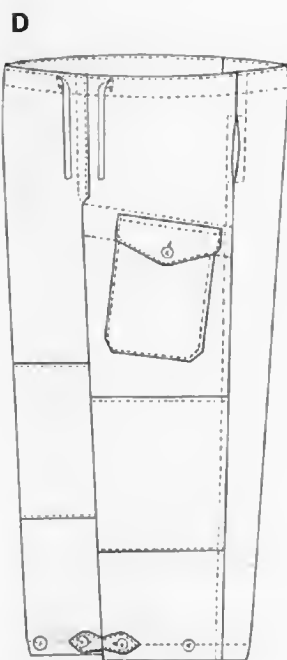
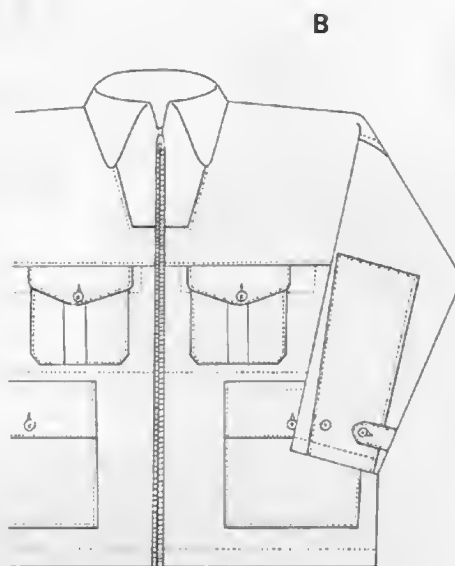
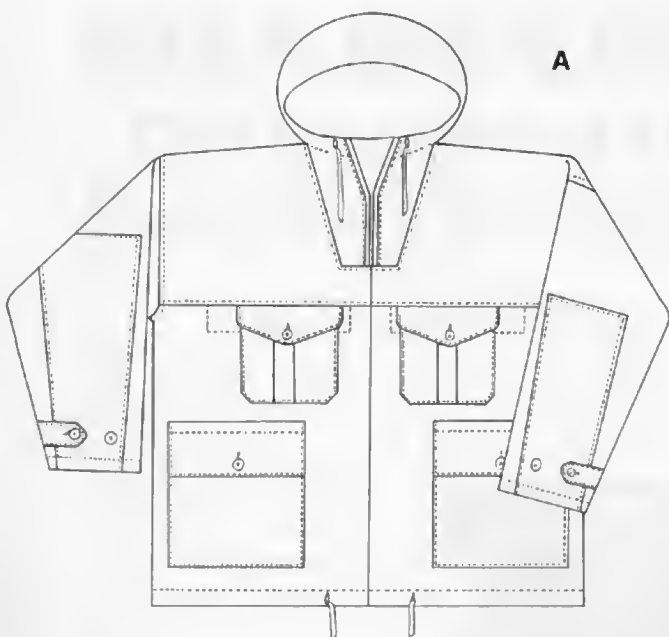
#### Centre:

Two para NCOs decorated at Dien Bien Phu before the start of the siege – the adjutant at the right still has his new Croix de Guerre TOE pinned on. He wears a 'fantasy' beret made from US camouflage cloth; a '47/52 smock in camouflage pattern D1, and '47/52 trousers in pattern C1. The same model and pattern of trousers are worn by the soldier in the US camouflage baseball cap, another locally-made 'fantasy' headgear.

waist, and a full-length fly flap closed over it by means of eight concealed buttons. The collar, 95mm deep, was of the same type as found on

(1) For a more wide-ranging illustrated review of French camouflage clothing in the 1950s and 1960s, see 'M' No. 16, pp. 27-34





Schematic drawings of British camouflage clothing, as worn and modified: (A) The 'smock, windproof' in original form. Typical modifications were the fitting of full-length (B) or half-length (C) zips to the front; the cutting down of the hood into a shallow, rounded collar (C); or its replacement altogether by a shirt-type collar made from the hood (B). (D) The 'trousers, windproof' in original form. Typical modifications were the fitting of a fly and belt loops, and the movement of the left thigh pocket to the outside of the leg (E); a second pocket was sometimes added to the right leg, either to the front or the outside to match the left. (Becky Shreeve)

#### Below:

Unusually, this paratrooper wears US Army camouflage trousers – note the high-set cargo pockets – with his British windproof smock, complete with hood.

the Denison smock – that is, if the zip was fully engaged the collar stood up round the neck, but it was normally worn folded down. The smock had buttoned shoulder straps.

The two large patch, bellows chest pockets had 195mm wide rectangular flaps closed by three snap fasteners (of the US 'cylinder and throat' type, replacing the older 'ball and throat' type). An interior pocket was provided behind the left chest pocket, closed by a zip up the full height of the inner edge of the latter. A small pen pocket was sewn to the out-

side of the left chest pocket. The skirt pockets, of the same bellows design, were 160mm wide and set on obliquely, with rectangular flaps closed by two snaps. All four front pockets had small drainage eyelets set in the bellows gussets in each lower corner.

Low in the centre of the back were set two oblique, internal pockets with pointed flaps closed by a single snap. Set in each side seam mid-way up the back were 240mm-long, zip-fastened ventilation slits. Centrally attached at the bottom rear was a 'beaver tail', copied from the Denison smock, for fastening between the legs; two rows of three snaps were set low on the front between the skirt pockets to secure the flap when it was pulled forward. When it was not in use it was fastened up the back, two snaps being provided on the lower back to engage the upper pair of the six on the





Operation 'Castor': Chef de Bataillon Bigeard of 6<sup>e</sup> BPC discusses the situation with Chef de Bataillon Charlet and Capt. Dubouchet. Bigeard was an enthusiast for the windproof 'sausage skin' material (see 'MI' No.3, p.49-52); here he wears the smock with the hood removed and an added shirt-type collar, as was usual in his battalion. The other two officers wear '47/52 jump uniforms.

**Below:**

Late in 1953, in the humid season before the monsoon, Chef de Bataillon Leclerc, commanding GAP 2 (centre, in beret) visits the Legion paratroopers of 1<sup>er</sup> BEP. He wears the four-pocket USMC 'third pattern' paratrooper's smock; and British windproof trousers with the map pocket moved to the outside of the leg. The man on his left, in the bush hat, wears the same trousers, with the USMC two-pocket 'Raider' jacket. Behind him the bearded Father Chevallier, the chaplain of GAP 2, wears a suit of retailed British windproofs including a 'Bigeard cap'. The soldier at extreme left, hands in pockets, wears the four-pocket USMC smock and unmodified windproof trousers.

tail itself. It could also be fixed up inside the back of the smock, a small thread loop at the end of the tail engaging with a small metal hook sewn inside the back.

continued on page 44





The camouflage pattern which we have designated **B1** only appeared on uniforms Modèle 1947/51. Its light tones and lack of contrast gave little camouflage effect, particularly when faded from use and washing.

Pattern **B2**, only seen on Mle. 1947/52 uniforms, was an inversion of B1, and the ground was dark rather than light khaki.

Pattern **C1**, encountered on Mle. 1947/52 jump uniforms, has the same colours as B2, but the size and shape of the 'brush-strokes' are noticeably different.

Used for Mle. 1947/52 smocks, but perhaps not for trousers in Indo-China, pattern **D1** went on to be used for several subsequent uniform models. It first appeared with a dark khaki ground, later on pale green; the shapes of the strokes are the same as for B1 and B2, but the very dark brown dessin secondaire is printed over the top of the green directeur. (All photos courtesy Militaria Magazine)



**B1**



**B2**



**C1**



**D1**



(3) Lt. Trapp, 6<sup>e</sup> BPC, wears for an award presentation in November 1953 a clean example of the British windproof camouflage suit, the smock typically modified by the removal of the hood, the addition of a shirt-type collar, and the insertion of a full-length zip. The trousers are unmodified. He wears the US M1 helmet with locally-modified strapping, a US pistol belt, and French 1950 jump-boots.

2

(2) Capt. Botella, commanding 5<sup>e</sup> BPVN, March 1954. Taken from a famous photograph, Botella wears a complete tenue de saut mle. 1947/52 in camouflage scheme 'C1'; his web belt and suspenders are French airborne 1950 issue, as are his jump-boots; the map case is US issue. His M1 helmet has the locally-added chin harness fastened up at the back. Unlike Cabirol, he does not appear to be wearing a rank patch on the smock.

3

Kevin Lyles' reconstructions show (1) Capt. Cabirol, commanding 4<sup>e</sup> Cie., 1<sup>er</sup> BEP in November 1953. He wears the pre-1953 'commando' version of the Legion paratroopers' dark green beret; the silver airborne troops' badge, obscured here, was worn above the right eye. The veste de saut mle. 1947/52 is in camouflage scheme 'D1'; the pantalon de saut mle. 1947/51 are in camouflage scheme 'B1'. He wears a US web pistol belt with French web suspenders 'TAP mle. 1950', a US pistol magazine pouch and M3 knife, and – obscured here – a French web pistol holster and a US web mapcase. The boots are the American 'double buckle' type. He is using an American AN/PRC 10 radio.

1



continued from page 41

The sleeve cuffs had a rear vent, fastened by a button, to allow the sleeves to be rolled. A broad tightening tab was sewn into the rear seam of each wrist, buttoning forwards around the outside.

*French airborne troops' camouflage clothing: (A) veste de saut mle. 1947/51; (B) veste de saut mle. 1947/52; (C) pantalon de saut mle. 1947/51; (D) pantalon de saut mle. 1947/52. (Christa Hook)*

Two broader tightening tabs were sewn into the body side seams close to the bottom hem, buttoning forwards (or occasionally, backwards).

*Jump trousers model 1947/51*

These had two slash pockets, two rear pockets, two side cargo pockets, and three small front pockets. The slash pockets normally had zip fasteners, but some batches only had the zip on the left pocket. The rear pockets were internal, with single-point snap-fastened flaps. The cargo pockets on the outside of each thigh were of bellows type, with an internal pleat down the

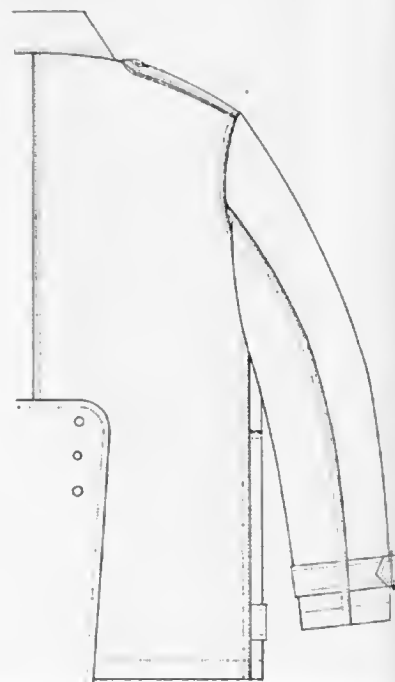
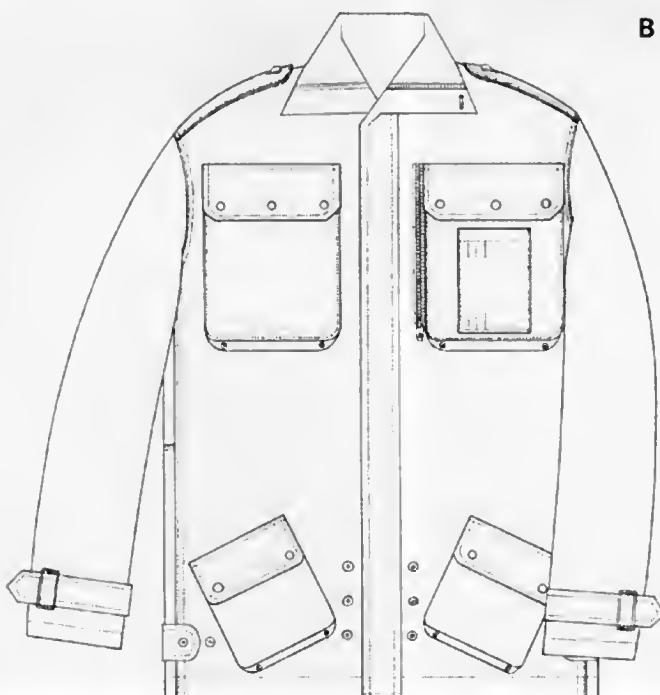
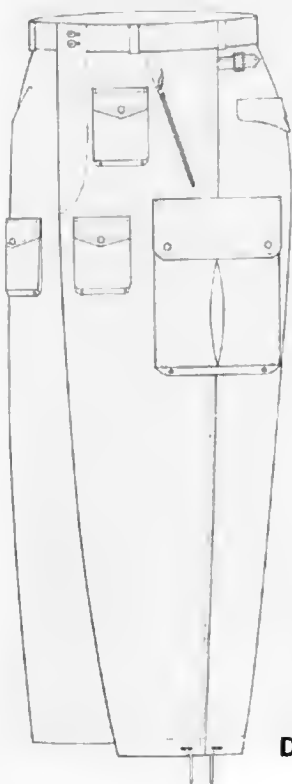
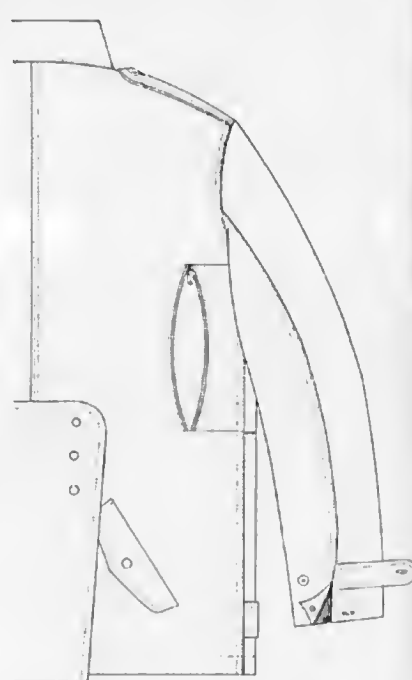
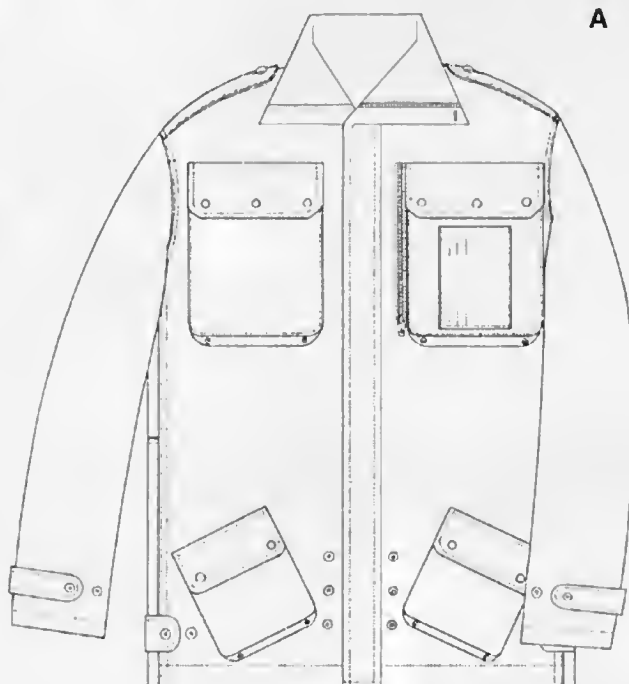
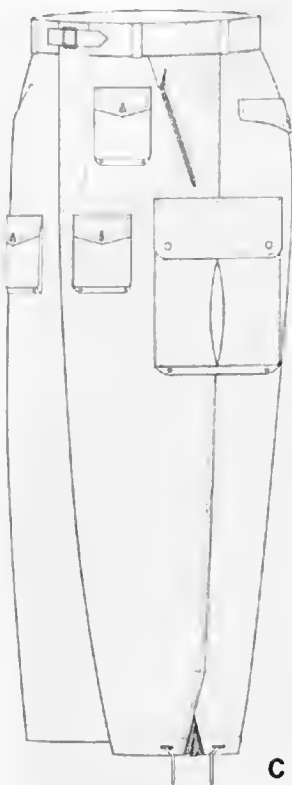
centre, the rectangular flap closing with two snaps. The three small front pockets, also of bellows type, were set one in front of the left hip, and one in front of and level with each cargo pocket; they had single-point buttoned flaps, not snap fasteners. Cargo and front pockets all had drainage eyelets in the bottom corners of the bellows gussets.

A cloth tightening tab at the front of the waist engaged with a patent sliding-clamp buckle. At the bottom of each outside leg seam was a vent, with an internal gusset, closed by a drawstring lace.

Each pair of trousers was issued with a pair of removable braces made in the same cloth.

*Camouflaged jump uniform model 1947/52*

Many modifications were proposed at the end of 1952, but bureaucratic delays prevented the appearance of the subsequent model in Indochina until late in 1953. All records of its manufacture and distribution seem to have been lost; nevertheless, pictorial evidence confirms the first issue in the Far East at the beginning of autumn 1953. This was the 'typical' uniform of the Dien Bien Phu





Lt. Allonsque of the 8<sup>e</sup> Choc studies maps before a reconnaissance patrol from Dien Bien Phu. As was common in this battalion, he wears the British Denison smock; his 'Bigeard cap' appears to be made of British windproof camouflage material.



Above:

A well-known photograph of a Vietnamese paratrooper of the 2<sup>e</sup> BEP, taken during Operation 'Brochet' two months before 'Castor', shows the British windproof smock's simplest modification: opening up the seam down the upper chest and adding a button.

paratrooper – although '47/51 and '47/52 uniforms might be seen side by side in one unit, or even smocks and trousers of the two uniforms mixed together.

#### *Jump smock model 1947/52*

The wrist tightening tabs now passed right round the sleeve and were fastened by sliding-clamp buckles. All the pockets and openings in the back of the smock disappeared. The collar depth was reduced, noticeably, to 55mm. Large ventilation eyelets were added beneath each arm.

#### *Jump trousers model 1947/52*

The vent and gusset disappeared from the bottom of the outward leg seam, but the drawstring was retained. Only the left-hand slash pocket was fastened with a zip. The waistband became narrower; the front tightening tab was replaced by two buttons through the top of the fly; and a tightening tab appeared on each hip, engaging backwards with a sliding-clamp buckle, set just below the waistband. The three small front pockets were now closed by snaps instead of buttons.

### CAMOUFLAGE PATTERNS

Uncamouflaged 'dark khaki' clothing might appear lighter or darker, depending upon small differences in the dyeing of different batches, and upon the degree of weathering and fading over a period of use and laundering. (For what it is worth, a new example approximates to shades 4E4 or 4E5 in the 'Methuen Handbook of Colour' – Ed.)

The model 1947/51 jump uniform was the only one to be produced in the camouflage pattern which we have arbitrarily designated **B1**, and was only produced in that pattern. It was formed by superimposition of three designs on a beige ground. The so-called *dessin directeur* was in pale green, formed of fairly sharp-edged 'brush strokes', slightly 'frayed'. These shapes, sometimes slightly modified, would reappear in all French camouflage patterns of the period. The *dessin secondaire* was in dark red-brown, and was formed of larger, more loosely sweeping shapes, noticeably more 'frayed' at

ends and edges. The third design, of a slightly darker green than the *dessin directeur*, was indistinct and hardly noticeable.

The 1947/52 jump uniform did not exist in dark khaki, but appeared in three distinguishable variations on this basic pattern. (The identification of the slight variations between different French camouflage items may seem pointless, but it does help in fixing the dating of surviving clothing.)

The first pattern applied to '47/52 items we may identify as **B2**. It is a simple inversion of the colours of B1 on a dark khaki ground, the red-brown now appearing as the *dessin directeur*, and olive green as the *dessin secondaire*. The green third design is, once again, hardly perceptible.

The second pattern, **C1**, is in the same colours as B2, but has a completely different design. The third shade is abandoned. (B2 is only found on '47/52 clothing; but confusingly, C1 may also be found on model 1947 clothing produced in camouflage finish in 1952).

The third pattern, **D1**, may

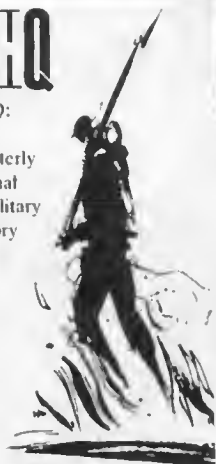
be found with slight colour differences on many of the subsequently produced French camouflage items. The shapes of the pattern are the same as in B1 and B2; the colours are those of B2 and C1, but inverted: the *dessin directeur* is green and the *secondaire* is dark brown, the latter appearing sharply dominant and giving a more barred effect than previously. In contemporary photos scheme D1 is easily identifiable on smocks, but has not yet been found on trousers, which may indicate that the '47/52 trousers in pattern D1 were not issued in Indochina. **M**

**To be continued:** Later articles in this series will deal with the uniforms of non-airborne units at DBP; with all types of headgear; and with personal equipment, of French and foreign manufacture, used at that period.



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*Left: Samnite panoply C. 321 B.C.*

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# Charles Young

JAMIE BISHER  
Paintings by RICHARD HOOK



Charles Young was the first black professional military officer in the United States. That he forged a successful military career in an era of unabashed racism was no mean feat; however, this sociological milestone overshadows a military record full of achievements which would have done credit to an officer not hampered by racial prejudice.

Young was born in 1865, just as the Civil War drew to its bitter close, in the little town of Helena, Kentucky. Like so many southern negroes, his parents subsequently moved, in this case to Ripley, Ohio. Charles was educated in the public schools of that town, and became a High School graduate at the age of 16 – in itself an achievement for a black youth in the 1870s. He himself became a teacher in the Ripley Colored High School; at that stage he was considering preparing himself to enter a Jesuit college. However, when he was given the opportunity to enter a competitive examination for appointment as a cadet at West Point, he changed his course. He was successful in the examination, and entered the Academy in June 1884 with the class of 1888.

Young was a naturally gifted musician and linguist; he played the piano as a child, by intuition, and in middle life he displayed a good working knowledge of Latin, Greek, French, Spanish and German. But these talents did not help him in the Academy's severe mathematical course during his first year; and in June 1885 he was turned back to join the class of 1889.

A fellow cadet remembered him as 'a rather awkward, overgrown lad, large-

boned and robust in physique, and of a nervous, impulsive temperament.' His nervousness is hardly surprising, given his unenviable position. It is clear that he was ostracised by his classmates, and the pressure must have been appalling. At one time he had the company of nine other black cadets; but one by one they were all discharged, succumbing to a gruelling curriculum which was certainly made no easier for them in an atmosphere of fierce bigotry. Young was left friendless; and a white classmate recalled hearing him 'converse in the German language with some of the foreign-born shoe-blacks . . . sheer loneliness impelled him to talk with anyone who would take an interest in his conversation.' The same man added that, by his fifth year, Young's dogged courage and persistence impressed some of the better sort among his classmates to treat him with 'the kindness and consideration which had long been his due.' Charles Young graduated from the US Military Academy and was commissioned in 1889.

## THE DESERT AND THE JUNGLE

Second Lieutenant Young spent the next five years with the 9th Cavalry at old frontier posts in Nebraska and Utah. The 9th was one of the 'colored' regiments staffed – prior to Young's arrival – by an all-white officer corps. 'He loved his men and they loved him', wrote a fellow officer. 'Among his other accomplishments, he was a natural musician; and it was not an uncommon sight to see him at the piano in his quarters, surrounded by a happy group of his men, entertaining and being enter-

tained. He possessed their sincere respect as well as their affectionate regard.'

In 1894 Young was detached to serve as Professor of Military Science and Tactics at Wilberforce University in Ohio. The writers W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Laurence Dunbar were among prominent black intellectuals who frequented the young lieutenant's home during these years.

When the Spanish-American War erupted in the spring of 1898 Young was appointed a major and battalion commander in the 9th Ohio Volunteer (Colored) Infantry. For eight months he drilled his men as they were shuffled from Ohio to Virginia, to Pennsylvania, to South Carolina – but never to the battlefields of Cuba or Puerto Rico. Finally, Young returned to his former rank of lieutenant with his old frontier unit at Fort Duchesne, Utah.

In May 1901 Charles Young, recently promoted captain, disembarked from a troopship in the Philippines. Within days he was leading his troopers into action against the *insurrectos*; and for a year and a half they fought across the island of Samar. Captain Young then returned to an appropriately restful assignment as superintendent of two National Parks in California.

Between 1904 and 1907 Young excelled himself as US military attaché to Haiti. He

*Lt. Col. Charles Young, US 10th Cavalry, photographed at Colonia Dublan, Chihuahua, Mexico in the second half of 1916.*

mapped a considerable portion of the island of Hispaniola, meanwhile conducting an 'extended military reconnaissance' which proved invaluable when US Marines splashed ashore to occupy Haiti a few years later. Somehow he also found time to write a book, rather portentously entitled *The Military Morale of Nations and Races*.

Young served another combat tour in the Philippines in 1908; and on his return reported to Fort Russell, Wyoming, as a squadron commander. Late in 1911, a letter from the renowned scientist Booker T. Washington inspired him to accept the 'Homeland detail' as military attaché to Liberia, America's African stepchild.

## BACK TO AFRICA

Liberia, a noble but muddled experiment, had been conceived in the 1820s as a West African home for freed and repatriated American slaves. Supported by philanthropists, several small settlements more or less struggled to survive, eventually coalescing in the Republic of Liberia. Though it attracted some fine and visionary men, this Utopian exercise was plagued by inherent weaknesses. Its ill-defined frontiers caused constant territorial squabbles. It was held back

by its lack of a viable economic base, and the tiny size of its educated class. Worst of all was the lack of a coherent policy governing relations between the black settlers and the (unconsulted) native tribes inland. By the turn of the century Liberia was, in effect, bankrupt, lawless, anarchic and corrupt. President Theodore Roosevelt launched a modest rescue effort, and Young's mission was backed with the theoretical authority to make changes, even if not by very generous resources.

When he arrived in Monrovia on 1 May 1912 Capt. Young found the republic's 'army', the Liberian Frontier Force, bordering on disintegration. The President and Secretary of War had no idea how many soldiers they commanded or where they were. Col. Lomax, the LFF commander, was running amok in the interior. The treasury was nearly empty; the inland tribes were in ferment; and parts of the nominally loyal population simmered in rebellion against the brutal and corrupt Americo-Liberian élite.

Capt. Young began to transform the LFF's mutinous 'brigands' into soldiers. Three Americans, trained by Young and commissioned into the LFF, reorganised the LFF battalion with the dubious aid of four Americo-

Liberian lieutenants 'of doubtful efficiency'. At the request of President Daniel Howard the Americans engineered the arrest of Col. Lomax, to howls of outrage from the renegade commander's political cronies.

Word came in late November 1912 that the American Capt. Arthur Brown was besieged, with 78 men, by cannibal tribesmen deep in the interior at Tappi. Young, now a major, set out to rescue him. The 'Brown Relief Expedition' trekked hundreds of miles through unmapped jungle, braving native warlords and endemic pestilence. Young wrote: 'Christmas Day, just one month after leaving Monrovia we found ourselves lost in the jungles of Liberia, surrounded by man-eating Manos, with about four clips of ammunition to the soldiers.' Days later he successfully relieved Capt. Brown; but when he returned to Monrovia in mid-January Young was carrying a musket-ball in a three-week-old wound, and was coming down with 'Black Water Fever'.

It was the disease, rather than the bullet, which nearly killed him, and he spent most of 1913 recovering. Nevertheless, the next two years saw him supervising the creation of a mobile LFF which managed to extinguish brushfire rebellions right across the republic's territory. In February 1916 the Governor of Massachusetts awarded Maj. Young the Spingarn Gold Medal for his military and civil accomplishments in Liberia.

## WAR AND DISAPPOINTMENT

By March 1916 Maj. Young was back in combat, leading a squadron of the US 10th Cavalry in pursuit of Pancho Villa's guerrillas. In May the regiment camped at Colonia Dublan in the Chihuahua desert. On 20 June, under secret orders from Gen. Pershing, Troops C and K were despatched to create an incident with the Carranzistas at Carrizal 90 miles away; nine Americans were killed, 11 wounded and 21 taken prisoner, and the ire of the Punitive Force and the American public was aroused. However, with America's entry into the First World War now a foregone conclusion, the State Department shrank from exploiting Pershing's *casus belli*. On 1 July 1916 Young was promoted lieutenant-colonel at Colonia Dublan; and it was there that the 10th Cavalry celebrated its 50th birthday, with 'a very clever program gotten up by Maj. Charles Young.' He was subsequently made regimental commander. The 10th began its march back to home base at Fort Huachuca, Arizona on 30 January 1917.

In June 1917 the War Department promoted Charles Young to colonel – and, mysteriously, retired him, citing nebulous medical reasons. He had seemed the logical choice to command an all-black division in France; but apparently the US Army was still not ready for a black general commanding a major formation in the field in a 'white man's war'. Amid considerable publicity the disappointed Col. Young

Richard Hook's reconstructions on the back cover show Young as (top): Second Lieutenant, 9th US Cavalry, 1889. The dress unmounted uniform is that of the 1888 regulations, little different from those of 1872 and 1882. The dress helmet, of cork covered in black felt with black leather binding and gilt metal fittings, has a cavalry yellow buffalo-hair plume; the regimental numeral is applied in silver to the centre of the eagle plate. The gold metallic thread helmet-lines are detached, and are worn round the torso; the loop which engaged with a hook under the tassel on the left side of the helmet is slipped over the top right tunic button. The frock is midnight blue, with two rows of seven buttons for company officers. The gold cuff laces previously worn were discarded in 1880, and all regimental officers wore plain cuffs with three small rear buttons. The gold shoulder-knots had cavalry yellow pads bearing embroidered silver badges of rank (here the single bars of a second lieutenant) flanking the regimental numeral. The company officers' dress belt was faced with gold lace, with three transverse stripes of yellow silk; it still bore the old 1851 eagle buckle with appliqué silver wreath. The 'sky'-blue trousers were in fact of quite a deep shade, with a hint of green in the blue.

(Bottom) Lieutenant-Colonel, 10th US Cavalry, 1916. Charles Young as he appears in a photograph taken shortly after his promotion to this rank at Colonia Dublan while serving with Pershing's expedition. The 'Montana peak' campaign hat bears, though obscured here, officers' cords in gold mixed with black thread. The olive drab service uniform was introduced in December 1902; here he wears the wool shirt, with black tie and metal badges of rank on the collars, and wool breeches. A good deal of latitude was allowed in campaign dress, and the photograph shows these buckle-and-lace boots. In action Young carried a Colt .39 revolver.

Embarkation of Liberian Frontier Force soldiers on a river steamer, 1909. Enlisted from among the 'hardest and most intelligent' indigenous tribesmen – Kpweissis, Bassas, Mendis, Buzis, Ghandes and Ghundes – rather than the Americo-Liberians, the LFF were first employed as bearers, boatmen and labourers. They enlisted for five years, and were – allegedly – paid \$7.20 a month, quarterly, half in cash and half in credit for goods from European traders. In 1909 they were armed with old Peabody breach-loaders; by October 1912 these had been replaced with Mausers. They wore a uniform of red fez, blue wool shirt similar to the old US Army type, blue knee-length trousers, red sash, and a grey blanket-roll. It is not known whether or to what extent the America LFF officers – Maj. Young, Maj. Ballard, Capt. Brown and Newton – wore the local uniform.



rode on horseback from his Ohio home to Washington, DC, to prove his fitness for duty; but to no avail.

The heartbroken colonel was restored to active duty four days before the Armistice in 1918 – a decision which it is hard not to regard in a cynical light. He returned to 'the Homeland detail' in a Liberia which had suffered severe economic setbacks during the Great War, and laboured on for three years. He died there in January 1922.

MM



# Charles Young

*Second Lieutenant,  
9th US Cavalry, 1889*



*Lieutenant-Colonel,  
10th US Cavalry, 1916*